Truth Project Thematic Report

Child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions

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INDEPENDENT INQUIRY
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Disclaimer

This research report has been prepared at the request of the Inquiry's Chair and Panel. The views expressed are those of the authors alone. The information presented in Truth Project research outputs does not constitute formal recommendations by the Inquiry's Chair and Panel and is separate from legal evidence obtained in investigations and hearings.

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We would like to thank all of the victims and survivors who came forward to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in religious contexts, the impacts this has had upon their lives and their ideas about what needs to change to prevent similar abuse in future.

We are also grateful for the contributions of the Inquiry's Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP), the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee, and the report's peer reviewers.

Executive summary

Introduction

This is the first publication in a series of thematic reports examining what victims and survivors have shared with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') as part of the Truth Project about their experiences of child sexual abuse and the institutional context in which it occurred. It details the research findings in relation to experiences of sexual abuse that occurred in 'religious contexts', based on the location or perpetrator of the abuse. This includes both sexual abuse that has taken place in a religious institution and sexual abuse that has taken place in a different setting but where the perpetrator was a member of the clergy or other staff affiliated with a religious institution (see section 1.2 for a more detailed discussion of our inclusion and exclusion criteria).

The accounts in this report are from victims and survivors who came to the Truth Project between June 2016 and November 2018. The majority of participants reported sexual abuse by individuals from Anglican and Catholic Churches in England and Wales. However, such abuse within other Christian denominations and other religions – including the Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam and Judaism – was also reported and is included in the analysis. The analysis was undertaken by members of the Inquiry's Research Team between November 2018 and May 2019.

In particular, the analysis aimed to address the following topics:

- The nature of child sexual abuse experienced by participants in religious contexts.
- What victims and survivors said about whether anything could have been done to prevent the abuse at the time and how much institutions knew about the abuse at the time.
- Victims and survivors' experiences of disclosing the abuse and the responses, including barriers and facilitators for disclosure.
- The impacts of child sexual abuse in religious contexts and victims and survivors' suggestions for improving the protection of children in religious institutions in future.

A full list of the specific research questions for this report can be found in Chapter 1.

This thematic report complements *Child sexual abuse within the Catholic and Anglican Churches: A rapid evidence assessment* (IICSA Research Team, 2017), and the Inquiry's investigations into the institutional response to allegations of child sexual abuse in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in England and Wales.

This report describes the experiences of participants who told us they were sexually abused in religious contexts between the 1940s and 2010s. Given that the most recent case of abuse included in this analysis occurred almost a decade ago and most of the experiences shared relate to experiences occurring in the 1970s and earlier, it is not possible to make any comparisons with current-day experiences in religious contexts on the basis of Truth Project data.

Sample and methods

The statistical information in this report is based on a sample of 1,697 participants who took part in the Truth Project during June 2016 to November 2018. Of these, 183 individuals told us they had been sexually abused as children in religious institutions, or by clergy or church-related staff elsewhere. To draw out themes and commonalities, quantitative data from these participants are shown alongside quantitative data from the 1,514 participants whose descriptions of abuse did not involve religious contexts.

As the participants in this report are individuals who have chosen to take part in the Truth Project, the statistics produced are not necessarily reflective of the general population. Differences between those sexually abused in religious and non-religious contexts should therefore not be interpreted as reflecting differences within the general population of victims and survivors. The differences should also not be interpreted as being statistically significant, as tests of significance[1] have not been carried out. Tables containing all the figures for the statistical data are available in Appendix A, with the salient points drawn out within the body of the report.

We also qualitatively analysed the experiences that 12 of these victims and survivors shared with the Truth Project. A total of 12 were selected to enable analysis of a range of experiences and circumstances of sexual abuse in religious contexts. This sample will also form part of a total of around 70 participant accounts that will be qualitatively analysed as part of the full Truth Project analysis. The sample for the qualitative analysis described in this report was randomly selected within a sampling framework designed to ensure we included a range of characteristics and circumstances, such as religious institution type, time period in which the abuse occurred, victim age and victim sex. This framework and further information about the sample can be found in Chapter 2.

The majority of cases analysed in this report relate to the Anglican or Catholic Church, with a minority relating to other Christian denominations or other religions[2]. In order to prevent the possible identification of participants in our qualitative sample and because the number of cases in each group was too small for meaningful quantitative analysis, we did not break down our research findings by specific religion or type of religious institution in this report. Consequently, we only draw out commonalities and differences between those abused in religious contexts and those abused in non-religious contexts.

An overview of the process used for carrying out analysis of Truth Project information can be found in the separate report, _Truth Project Research: Methods_ (King and Brähler, 2019).

Ethics

All social research conducted or commissioned by the Inquiry is subject to approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee. The Truth Project research is subject to rigorous ethical scrutiny as the data collected are highly personal and sensitive. In order to safeguard these data, each component of the research process was reviewed in line with strict ethical standards by the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee. For example, the wording of the 'consent for research' statement that Truth Project

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[1] Tests of significance are typically used to assess whether a result is likely to have occurred by chance. For example, a statistically significant result would suggest that a result is unlikely to be explained by chance.

[2] These include: Judaism, Baptist, Methodist, Mormon, Salvation Army, United Reform Church.

participants are presented with was discussed and agreed with the Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the collection and analysis of the data.

Information is only included where Truth Project participants have agreed to their accounts being used for research purposes. All information analysed for this report was anonymised prior to analysis and all identifying information has been removed.

Key findings from the research

The research findings from this study indicate particular features and characteristics of sexual abuse in religious contexts in the past. Although this is the first of our published thematic reports, ongoing analysis and review of wider Truth Project sessions data suggests that abuse in religious contexts features some particularly notable characteristics:[3]

- Those sexually abused in a religious context often did not report the abuse whilst it was ongoing due to feelings of shame or embarrassment.

- The types of sexual abuse reported by participants in religious contexts typically involved fondling or other forms of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact, rather than penetrative abuse.

- Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in a religious context often shared that they knew of others being abused in the same institution or by the same perpetrator.

- Participants considered that the power, authority and reverence bestowed upon religious institutions and the individuals working within them meant that the conduct of perpetrators was not questioned. This made it relatively easy for them to find opportunities to abuse and they were able to act with relative impunity.

- The reported extent of influence and involvement the religious institutions had over their communities and the daily lives, culture and background of victims and survivors and their families was more pronounced than typically seen in other institutions. This provided more opportunities for the abuse and made it particularly difficult for victims and survivors to be able to tell anyone about what was happening. Connected with this was the way in which perpetrators were able to use the child's spirituality and religion to manipulate them.

- When disclosing sexual abuse as a child or as an adult, participants abused in a religious context often shared that they reported their experiences of abuse to someone in authority inside the institution. This indicates the level of influence religious institutions often have.

- The protection of the reputation of the religious institution and individual perpetrators at all costs meant victims and survivors said they were often disbelieved, discredited and not supported after disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse both as children and as adults. Participants perceived that these protections were offered by religious leaders as well as community members and were viewed by participants to be more extensive than seen in other types of institution.

- There was an apparent contradiction in some cases between victims and survivors being told their disclosures were not believed or being actively discredited and the perpetrators being moved elsewhere within the religious institution, including overseas. Participants knew at the time or found out later that those in the new location were not advised of the known concerns about the perpetrator, creating further risk of abuse.

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[3] Please note that these research findings are not necessarily representative of the wider population and that differences found between abuse in religious and non-religious contexts have not been tested for statistical significance.

- The spiritual impact of the abuse upon victims and survivors is evident in these accounts of sexual abuse that occurred within religious contexts. This can have a particularly damaging impact on victims and survivors, particularly where their religion provided the foundation to their morality, beliefs, social relationships and the way they lived their daily lives.

Background of children abused in religious contexts

Participation in the Truth Project sessions to date demonstrates a higher proportion of males among participants sexually abused in a religious context compared with those abused in a non-religious context (61 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

Overall, the most common individual decade for such abuse to commence was the 1970s, with one in three participants reporting the abuse started in this time period. However, 42 per cent of participants sexually abused in religious contexts reported abuse that commenced prior to the 1970s, compared to 30 per cent of participants who were abused in other contexts. This suggests that among participants who took part in the Truth Project, experiences of child sexual abuse in religious contexts tended to commence in a slightly earlier time period than for those abused in other contexts.

The most common age range for participants to first experience abuse in a religious context was 8–11 years old (41 per cent). The age of participants when they first experienced child sexual abuse in a religious context was slightly older on average than for those abused in non-religious contexts. Of the participants sexually abused in a religious context, 73 per cent of participants shared that they were eight or older when the abuse started in comparison to 56 per cent of participants abused in other contexts.

Participants highlighted that religion was central to their childhoods and family life. Many spoke of emotional distance and dysfunction within their families. Others, many of whom were isolated, geographically or socially, described solitary childhoods.

Context and nature of the sexual abuse

The majority of participants reported that they were sexually abused by individuals from the Anglican and Catholic Churches in England and Wales. However, individuals from other Christian denominations and other religions – including the Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam and Judaism – came to the Truth Project and were also included in the analysis. Perpetrators were often highly regarded and held particular positions of power in their communities.

Participants abused in religious contexts spoke most often about fondling (62 per cent), followed by other forms of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact (34 per cent). This contrasts slightly with abuse that occurred in other contexts, where participants most often talked about fondling (54 per cent) and penetrative abuse (50 per cent). Participants described the abuse as progressively escalating and many were abused over an extended period of time.

Institutional context and knowledge of the abuse

Participants described male-dominated, closed and insular religious institutions with considerable influence on the community and the lives of their congregants. They described self-governing institutions with little or no external contact or supervision. Many participants knew of someone else being sexually abused in the same institution. Some participants either knew or strongly believed that those within the institution knew about the abuse at the time and that other adults (including parents and other professionals) did not act as a result of the power and control of the religious institution and religious leaders. This power, by virtue of a perceived higher authority, and the lack of safeguarding awareness or practices, created conditions where perpetrators were easily able to abuse and where a range of strategies were used by religious leaders and others in the community to protect the institution. In this context participants reported how the reputation of the institution was seen as paramount and the needs of child victims were diminished or ignored.

Experiences of disclosure and responses by institutions

Only around a third of victims and survivors in this sample had disclosed or reported any of the abuse at the time. Participants who did not disclose the abuse at the time spoke of the fact there was no one for them to tell and there was no encouragement to open up and disclose in any indirect ways either. Barriers to disclosing at the time of the sexual abuse were reported to be: lacking a relationship with a trusted adult; feelings of shame and embarrassment; lack of education around sex and abuse; and fear of the power and influence of the religious community.

Where participants had disclosed at the time of the abuse, this had typically been to a person in authority inside the institution. When disclosing, many participants shared that they were disbelieved, had their experiences of abuse minimised and little or no action was taken.

Participants who disclosed as adults typically reported their experiences of such abuse to the police or a person in authority inside the institution. Generally participants shared that they were disappointed with the response of the authorities they reported to. They described responses from authorities as muted and noted a lack of communication between the authority and the individual.

Barriers to disclosing as adults mentioned by participants were: not wanting their families to find out; fearing hostility from the religious community; and their past experiences of unsuccessfully challenging religious institutions.

Overall, a greater proportion of participants sexually abused in a religious context reported their experiences of abuse to someone in authority inside the institution than participants who were abused in other contexts, both as a child and as an adult. This difference indicated the relative influence religious institutions had in comparison to other institutions.

Experiences of the criminal justice system

A small number of participants abused in a religious context reported the abuse to the police at the time it was happening, with a greater proportion choosing to disclose to a person in authority inside the institution. However, when reporting the abuse after it ended, participants most commonly reported it to the police. Participants described mixed experiences when dealing with the police and criminal justice agencies as adults. Some individual officers were supportive and helpful, others lacked compassion and minimised the sexual abuse as it related to non-recent events.

Impacts of abuse

Participants spoke extensively about the life-long impact of their experiences of sexual abuse in religious contexts. Many participants described the detrimental impact the abuse had on their mental health. Notable amongst those who had experienced abuse in a religious context were feelings of guilt and loss of religious faith. A high percentage of participants sexually abused in religious contexts also reported an impact on their sexual behaviour.

Coping and recovery

Participants described a wide variety of coping mechanisms they had employed, including suppressing memories or forcing themselves to carry on with their lives regardless. Others talked about actively speaking out about their experiences of abuse, giving something back to their community, choosing to believe in a greater good or seeking validation and justice. For many, recovery was complicated because they had been abused by religious individuals and, subsequently, their belief systems had been challenged.

Experiences of support

A minority of victims and survivors spoke about accessing any kind of support services as children. As adults, most participants reported receiving both informal and formal support, with the support of family members and counsellors often mentioned. Experiences of formal support were very mixed. Overall, victims and survivors alluded to the idea that they had to overcome systemic issues within support services – such as long waiting lists and the limited availability of some services – and constantly fight to receive the support they required.

Victims and survivors' suggestions for change

Participants made a number of suggestions to improve child protection and assist victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in future.

Structurally, it was suggested that there needed to be better counselling and support provision and that child protection education and support in religious institutions should be delivered by external agencies who are specially approved. Financially, participants thought there should be an end to deadlines impacting on the ability of victims and survivors to receive compensation. Culturally, participants stated that the secrecy that comes from the sanctity of religious institutions and the assumption of the automatic morality of those involved in them had to be addressed. Politically and professionally,

it was suggested that victims and survivors needed to be at the centre of all concerns, actions and support relating to sexual abuse. Religious institutions and their leaders needed to take responsibility for abuse that has happened, come together to effect required change and ensure child protection policies and procedures were fully implemented in the best interests of the child.

Overall, the research findings detailed in this report share many similarities with previous research into sexual abuse in the Anglican and Catholic Churches (see Dreßing et al., 2018), including the Research Team's *Child sexual abuse within the Catholic and Anglican Churches: A rapid evidence assessment* (IICSA Research Team, 2017) and the Australian Royal Commission's findings relating to experiences of abuse in religious institutions (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

Consistent with our research findings here, these reports found that a central factor in the child sexual abuse in religious contexts was the particularly high regard and trust placed in religious institutions and those associated with them (often referred to as 'clericalism' in the Catholic Church) (IICSA Research Team, 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). This status has both enabled abuse in religious contexts and hindered appropriate responses to it.

Note on language

Please see Appendix B for a glossary which contains definitions of various terms used throughout this report.

Where the term 'abuse' is used throughout the report we are generally referring to sexual abuse, unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1
Introduction

This chapter provides background information about this specific research project and its aims.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') aims to consider the extent to which state and non-state institutions in England and Wales have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and to make meaningful recommendations for change. Further information about how the Inquiry works and its Terms of Reference can be found on the Inquiry website.

The Truth Project is a core part of the Inquiry alongside Research and Public Hearings. It was set up to hear and learn from the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales. Information gathered through the Truth Project provides the Inquiry with rich insights into child sexual abuse. With the consent of participants, the Inquiry uses this information in a variety of ways, including for ongoing research and data analysis carried out by the Inquiry's Research Team. Using this information for research allows us to build the evidence base around child sexual abuse. It is an important building block in helping the Inquiry develop recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse happening in the future and improve institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Further information about the Truth Project can be found on its specific website.

This particular thematic report complements other work undertaken by the Inquiry examining child sexual abuse in religious institutions.

1.1   Investigation into religious institutions

The Inquiry is currently undertaking three investigations into the extent of any institutional failures to protect children from sexual abuse in religious institutions. The first two of these are specifically looking at the Catholic and Anglican Churches. These investigations consider the nature and scale of, and institutional responses to, child sexual abuse within these two religious institutions. The first public hearing for the Catholic Church investigation was held in November 2017 and the first public hearing for the Anglican Church investigation was held in March 2018. The Inquiry also published an investigation report in August 2018 about Ampleforth and Downside Abbeys, which are affiliated to the English Benedictine Congregation, and their respective schools. Further public hearings in relation to the Churches' investigations will take place in July 2019 for the Anglican Church, and October 2019 for the Catholic Church. The third investigation, announced in May 2019, is a wider review of the current child protection policies, practices and procedures in religious institutions with a significant presence in England and Wales.

1.2   Research into religious institutions

To support these investigations, in November 2017, the Inquiry's Research Team published *Child sexual abuse within the Catholic and Anglican Churches: A rapid evidence assessment* (IICSA Research Team, 2017), which summarised the existing research literature on child sexual abuse within these institutions. The REA highlighted existing research that described structural and cultural issues within both the Catholic and Anglican Churches that enabled child sexual abuse, such as the particular authority, trust in and influence of members of the clergy. It also noted that, according to existing research, responses to child sexual abuse within these institutions often did not meet the needs of victims and survivors, with the protection of the Churches' reputation being prioritised.

This thematic report complements this earlier work by presenting an analysis of the experiences of victims and survivors who had engaged with the Truth Project and who were previously sexually abused in religious contexts. It also shares their voices more widely to enhance understanding of how this abuse took place and the impacts it has had upon their lives. This report examines instances of child sexual abuse relating to a range of religious institutions, and is not exclusively focussed on the Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Cases of sexual abuse that occurred within a religious context were identified for analysis based on the location or perpetrator of the abuse.

Cases were included where the sexual abuse took place:

- in a religious institution, which includes any building or space that is used as a religious place of worship;
- in a location affiliated with a religious institution (such as abuse that took place in a youth group run by a religious institution).

In addition, cases were also selected where the perpetrator(s) were:

- members of the clergy or individuals who carried out religious duties;
- individuals who worked for a religious institution (not including religious schools), such as volunteers, scripture teachers or youth group leaders;
- other children or young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours in the context of an organisational culture of abuse (such as in close-knit religious communities, where abuse may have been perpetrated by another child rather than a member of the clergy).

Participants who experienced more than one episode of sexual abuse, with abuse occurring in both religious and non-religious contexts were included in the sample of those who were abused in religious contexts. However, the characteristics of the abuse we analysed (the nature, perpetrator, duration etc.) relate to the religious context only.

Cases involving religious schools and children's homes were not included in the sample involving abuse in religious contexts unless either:

- the perpetrator was included in one of the categories listed above (such as a member of the clergy) or
- abuse had also occurred in a religious institution setting (such as a church or parish).

Sexual abuse experienced in religious schools – including abuse that took place in or was perpetrated by a member of staff at such a school – will meet our inclusion criteria for the Truth Project thematic report on schools. Similarly, sexual abuse experienced in religious children's homes – including abuse which occurred in or was perpetrated by a member of staff at such a home – will meet our inclusion criteria for the Truth Project thematic report on welfare institutions. This is because the extent to which schools and children's homes in England and Wales are affiliated with a religion varies greatly. Thus, in this context, their primary functions are considered to be education and welfare rather than religious, meaning that the schools and welfare institutions thematic reports will be typically most relevant to such cases.

1.3   Research questions

The Truth Project analysis explores two overarching research questions:

- **What have victims and survivors shared about their experiences of child sexual abuse and the institutional contexts in which it occurred and was responded to?**

- **What similarities and differences are there in victims and survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse across time periods, groups and institutions?**

This report seeks to explore the first question specifically in relation to child sexual abuse experienced in a religious context. It sets out Truth Project participants' experiences of sexual abuse relating to a range of religious denominations. We understand and acknowledge the differences between different religious denominations and communities. However, this report provides an overview of experiences in religious contexts more generally to understand commonalities arising across denominations, rather than aiming to provide direct and specific comparisons between different religious institutions.

As this is the first of our published thematic reports on Truth Project data, with regard to the second research question, our comparisons focus on the general similarities and differences in experiences of child sexual abuse in religious contexts and those occurring in non-religious contexts. Comparisons across institutions and time periods will be undertaken at a later point when we have the opportunity to carry out a fuller comparative analysis.

1.4   Research themes and sub-questions

The first research question has been broken down into seven themes, which we have explored in this report through the associated research sub-questions set out in Table 1.1.

This report is the first publication from our overall Truth Project research and addresses the research questions set out above. More detail about our research questions and themes for our ongoing Truth Analysis is provided in the separate report *Truth Project Research: Methods* (King and Brähler, 2019).

Table 1.1 Research themes and associated sub-questions

Theme	Associated research sub-question
Backgrounds of victims and survivors	Who has come forward to the Truth Project to share an experience of child sexual abuse?
Nature of sexual abuse experienced	What do people share about the nature of the child sexual abuse they experienced?
Institutional contexts	How much did members of institutions know about what was happening? What have victims and survivors said about whether anything could have been done by the institution at the time to prevent the sexual abuse?*
Disclosure	What were victims and survivors' experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse (as a child/adult) and what has helped or hindered disclosure? How were disclosures or allegations of child sexual abuse responded to by those within and outside institutions?†
Impacts of sexual abuse	What are the impacts of child sexual abuse?
Experiences of support	What has helped or hindered victims and survivors' recovery?
Victims and survivors' suggestions for change	What changes do victims and survivors suggest to improve child protection and prevent child sexual abuse in the future?

* Were there features of religious institutions that appeared to enable or facilitate the abuse?

† Within institutions includes for example, police, local authorities, the criminal justice system, and the health sector.
  Outside these institutions includes for example, family and local communities.

1.5   Report structure

The report is structured in the following way:

- Chapter 2 provides information on the Truth Project dataset and the sampling framework used for this report.

- Chapter 3 provides socio-demographic information about victims and survivors who shared their experiences of sexual abuse in religious contexts with the Truth Project. It also provides a description of the family and early life backgrounds of the participants in the qualitative element of the study and how religious institutions were part of their lives as children.

- Chapter 4 details the context and nature of the abuse experienced by participants in religious contexts.

- Chapter 5 describes the characteristics and features of the religious institutions and how these facilitated the perpetration of child sexual abuse. It considers what participants shared about what knowledge institutions and the individuals within them had about abuse that was occurring at the time.

- Chapter 6 presents information about participants' experiences of disclosing the sexual abuse, both as children and as adults, and the impact of the responses upon them. The barriers to disclosure shared by participants are also reported. It also describes participants' experiences of the police and criminal justice system after disclosing or reporting the abuse.

- Chapter 7 describes the range of impacts of the sexual abuse shared by participants and what has helped or hindered their recovery. It details emotional and psychological, physical, social and sexual, behavioural, educational and financial impacts as well as reporting on the wider impacts of the abuse on others, including participants' partners and families.

- Chapter 8 relays ways participants have found of coping with their experiences of sexual abuse as children. It also describes their experiences of formal and informal support in helping them deal with the consequences and impacts of child sexual abuse in religious contexts.

- Chapter 9 concludes the report by providing a summary of the key research findings and themes identified in the report. It details the characteristics identified in these cases of child sexual abuse in religious contexts and suggests how these may differ from abuse in other institutions and circumstances. The chapter concludes by detailing the changes participants think are necessary to prevent abuse in religious institutions for children in future and to improve responses to, and support for, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

Chapter 2
Sample and methods

This chapter provides information on the Truth Project dataset and the sampling framework used for this report. An overview of the method used in the Truth Project research can be found in the separate report, _Truth Project Research: Methods_ (King and Brähler, 2019).

The Truth Project is ongoing during the life of the Inquiry. It was piloted in November 2015 with the offer of private sessions commencing in June 2016, and will continue to run until the end of the Inquiry. The information for this report has been gathered from sessions that took place between June 2016 and November 2018. Research findings on child sexual abuse in religious contexts will be updated for the final analysis of Truth Project data, which will be published at the end of the Inquiry.

We have used mixed methods in the analysis undertaken for this report, which means we analysed both quantitative information (eg numbers, percentages) and qualitative information (eg words, text and themes). We have made it clear in the text where we are specifically referring to quantitative or qualitative information. Quantitative research findings are provided through descriptive statistical information about all 183 individuals who had reported being sexually abused as children in religious institutions, or by clergy or church-related staff elsewhere, and who had taken part in the Truth Project up until November 2018. Qualitative research findings are derived from the analysis of the more detailed individual records of the experiences of 12 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in religious contexts shared with the Truth Project up until November 2018.

In our reporting, we have not broken down our analysis by specific religion or type of religious institution. The majority of cases analysed in this report relate to the Anglican or Catholic Church, with a minority relating to other Christian denominations or other religions. Due to the varying levels of representation each religion had in our analysis, presenting research findings by religion or type of religious institution might have resulted in the ability to identify individuals or specific communities, or lead to inaccurate conclusions being drawn. Comparisons between experiences of sexual abuse in religious contexts across different time periods are also not addressed in this report. In this report we present the more general commonalities and differences between those abused in religious contexts and those abused in non-religious contexts. We aimed to identify common themes among participants' experiences. However, we recognise that the research findings included in this report are not relevant to all religions and faiths and are indicative of the specific experiences of Truth Project participants.

2.1   Quantitative sample and methods

People can participate in the Truth Project through a private session – either in person or over the telephone – or by submitting an experience in writing. Thus far, most people have attended a private session in person, with 86 per cent of people abused in a religious context and 83 per cent abused in other contexts choosing to share their experience in this way. However, it should be noted that the option of private sessions via telephone was only fully introduced in October 2018, and it is anticipated that the number of victims and survivors sharing experiences in this way will grow over time. We analyse the data that participants have shared with the Truth Project. Of the 1,697 people who shared an experience during the period from June 2016 to November 2018, 183 (11 per cent) described child sexual abuse that took place within a religious institution (133 people) and/or was perpetrated by clergy or church-related staff (153 people).[4]

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[4] The number of cases that took place in a religious institution and the number of cases where the perpetrator was a member of the clergy or church-related staff does not equal the number in our total sample (n = 183). This is because some participants reported abuse that both took place in a religious institution and was perpetrated by a member of the clergy or church-related staff, whereas other participants shared experiences of abuse that only fell under one of these categories.

For purposes of comparison, quantitative data from participants who were sexually abused in a religious context are compared with quantitative data from participants whose descriptions of abuse did not involve religious contexts. As the participants included in our analysis and described in this report are individuals who had chosen to take part in the Truth Project, the sample is not random, and therefore the statistics produced are not necessarily representative of the general population. Differences between those abused in religious and non-religious contexts presented in the report should also not be interpreted as reflecting differences within the general population of victims and survivors. The differences should also not be interpreted as being statistically significant, as tests of significance[5] have not been carried out. Tables containing detailed statistical data are available in Appendix A, with the salient points drawn out within the body of the report. The Inquiry has no information about those victims and survivors who chose not to come forward.

2.2   Qualitative sample and methods

The sample for qualitative analysis was selected by, firstly, listing all Truth Project sessions that related to a religious context. From this list, we selected cases using quotas to ensure a range of characteristics within each of the following categories:

- time period in which the sexual abuse occurred;
- type of religious community in which the abuse occurred;
- age of victim and survivor when the sexual abuse began; and
- sex of victim and survivor when the sexual abuse began.

A total of 12 accounts were selected to provide diversity across the sample and reflect a range of experiences and circumstances. This number provides a proportion of the planned overall sample of around 70 cases we expect to include in the full qualitative analysis work. It also reflects an appropriate proportion of the anticipated number of participants who will take part in the Truth Project before the end of the Inquiry. A complete sample of around 70 cases is anticipated to provide a large enough number to reach 'saturation'; in a research context this refers to the point at which the addition of further cases would not provide new categories in analysis (Katz et al., 2017; Bowen, 2008). More than 50 is considered to constitute a large sample in qualitative participant-based research (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Sandelowski, 1995).

The characteristics of the sample used for this report are detailed in Table 2.1. This sample is not representative of all individuals sexually abused in a religious context as children, as participants who have chosen to share an experience through the Truth Project are not representative of the general population. These 12 cases do not proportionally reflect the number of people who have participated in the Truth Project from different faiths and denominations. Instead, these 12 cases were selected in order to ensure a range of experience was captured.

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[5] Tests of significance are typically used to assess whether a result is likely to have occurred by chance. For example, a statistically significant result would suggest that a result is unlikely to be explained by chance. However, such tests can only be used on certain types of data.

Table 2.1   Qualitative sample characteristics (Truth Project participants sexually abused in religious contexts)

Characteristic	Category	No. of participants
Religion in which abuse occurred	Roman Catholic	3
	Anglican	2
	Other Christian	3
	Jehovah's Witness	2
	Orthodox Judaism	1
	Islam	1
Time period of abuse	Pre-1970s	4
	1970s–1980s	4
	1990s–present	3
	Not known	1
Age when abuse began	11 years and under	6
	12 years and older	6
Sex	Female	6
	Male	6

The framework approach was used as the method for the qualitative analysis. Further details of this approach can be found in the separate report, _Truth Project Research: Methods_ (King and Brähler, 2019).

Backgrounds of children sexually abused in religious contexts

This chapter provides socio-demographic information about victims and survivors who shared their experiences of sexual abuse in religious contexts with the Truth Project. It also provides a description of the family and early life backgrounds of the participants in the qualitative element of the study and how religious institutions were part of their lives as children. This chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- **Who has come forward to the Truth Project to share an experience of child sexual abuse in a religious context?**

3.1 Demographic information about participants

3.1.1 Quantitative information

The following information provides some details from our quantitative analysis on the characteristics of Truth Project participants who were abused in religious contexts and compares these with those abused in other contexts.

Information at time of abuse
Across all participants, just under one in three (32 per cent) reported first experiencing sexual abuse in the 1970s. However, the experiences of participants sexually abused in religious contexts relate to a slightly earlier time period than those who told us about experiences of abuse in non-religious institutions; 42 per cent talked about abuse that first took place prior to the 1970s[6], compared to 30 per cent of participants abused in other contexts.

The age of participants when they first experienced sexual abuse in a religious context was slightly older than people abused in non-religious contexts; 73 per cent of participants shared that they were aged eight or older, compared to 56 per cent of people abused in non-religious contexts (see Figure 3.1).

Information at time of attending Truth Project
Attendance at the Truth Project so far demonstrates a higher proportion of males among participants sexually abused in a religious context compared with those who told us about experiences of abuse in non-religious contexts (61 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

Nearly a third of participants sexually abused in a religious context were in their 50s when they attended the Truth Project (32 per cent, similar to the 31 per cent who were abused in other contexts). However, the average age of those abused in religious contexts was slightly older than those who were not abused in religious contexts; 54 years old compared to 49 years old.

The majority of people who have participated in the Truth Project are from white backgrounds, and this holds true both for those who were abused in religious contexts and those who were not (93 per cent and 92 per cent respectively). For both groups the majority of participants identified as heterosexual/straight, though there was a higher proportion of gay men among participants abused in a religious context (11 per cent compared to 4 per cent), reflecting the higher proportion of men in this cohort.

Nearly half (49 per cent) of participants sexually abused in religious contexts reported an illness or condition that affects their lives, similar to the 52 per cent who were abused in non-religious contexts.

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[6] This includes abuse that commenced in the 1930s or earlier through to the 1960s.
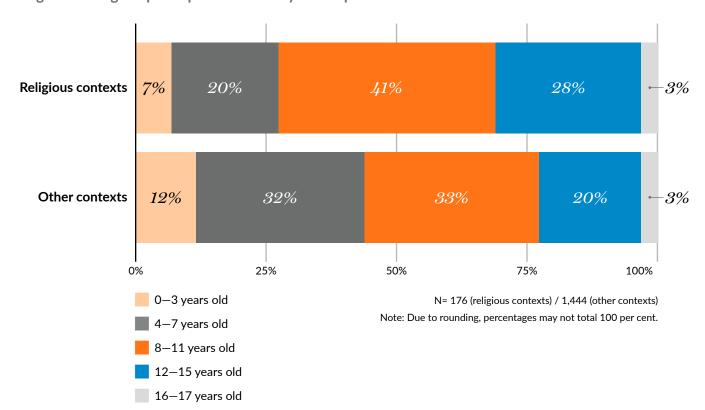
Figure 3.1 Age of participants when they first experienced sexual abuse

N= 176 (religious contexts) / 1,444 (other contexts)

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100 per cent.

Legend:
- 0—3 years old
- 4—7 years old
- 8—11 years old
- 12—15 years old
- 16—17 years old

Participants' reasons for sharing an experience of child sexual abuse with the Truth Project

The most common reason given for attending a session was to prevent sexual abuse from happening to someone else. This was true of both participants abused in a religious context (59 per cent) and participants abused in other contexts (54 per cent). Other common reasons given by participants abused in religious contexts for attending a Truth Project session included wanting to tell someone in authority (22 per cent) and wanting some type of resolution to the experience (21 per cent).

3.2 Participants' backgrounds, families and childhoods

3.2.1 Qualitative information

Role of religion

It was clear that religion structured and shaped the participants' lives while growing up. All of the participants were born into families where religion was central to family life. Most of them talked about families who attended religious services regularly or were actively involved in their local religious institution. A number of participants made it clear that their families' faith was particularly strong or a real source of pride.

> " *The rosary was recited every night and from an early age, six or seven, I attended mass as an altar server, sometimes before going to school and certainly at least once on a Sunday.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants described themselves in a similar manner, explaining that they were also 'incredibly religious' and 'very devout' as children. A number of participants were involved in religious tasks as children, many of whom served as altar boys. For others, their involvement in the religious institution was limited to weekly services, classes or events. For all participants, their involvement with the religious institution, regardless of its extent, was explicitly encouraged by members of their families. Participants explained that their families were 'very proud' and participating in church activities was very much encouraged. Another explained that she was always early to her religious classes because her mother valued them so highly.

In many cases, participants described how their families' religious affiliation directly shaped their early lives. A number of participants assigned primary importance to religion in defining their upbringing. For example, participants explained that they were 'raised as a [Jehovah's] Witness' or 'brought up in the Catholic faith'. In other accounts, participants explained how the religious institution permeated all aspects of their lives by structuring the social activities, schooling and, in some cases, employment of their local community.

Some participants were raised in highly religious communities. Such communities tended to be geographically and culturally isolated from mainstream society. One such participant explained that his community *"dislike[d] any outside influence; and everything [was] supposed to be dealt with internally"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Two further participants described being raised in a similar environment, noting that they were unable to associate with anyone outside of their religious community. One of these participants highlighted the reach and control of her religious community by recounting how a personal incident at school – a mainstream institution outside of the community's confines – was relayed back to the community within hours.

Vulnerabilities experienced by participants' families

Aside from their religious affiliations, participants touched on various circumstantial vulnerabilities facing their families when they were children. Geographical isolation was common. Some victims and survivors experienced this temporarily, for example, after moving house. However, those living in closed communities experienced this over longer periods of time. By 'closed communities' we are referring to those religious communities which are intentionally geographically or socially isolated from external individuals or institutions who do not subscribe to the same religious beliefs. This sense of isolation was heightened for some of those who attended religious schools because they had to travel some distance to attend school and therefore lived far from their friends. For the small number of participants who attended religious schools and also undertook particular religious tasks, as an altar boy for example, their schooling was often interrupted so they could carry out their duties.

Some participants described having to support their families during periods when their mothers were incapacitated by mental health issues. For example, one participant described having taken on caring responsibilities for her siblings as a teenager, as a result of her mother's depression:

> *My life [was] making sure that my siblings were cared for and clean before I went to school, and then I had to race home, and make sure that [the baby] was cared for and cleaned when I got home, because my mum, at the time, simply was not capable.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants and their families faced structural constraints. A number of participants mentioned that they grew up in impoverished circumstances. One participant explained that the issues associated with poverty were exacerbated by pressure from within her tightly knit religious community to keep up appearances. A small number of participants reported belonging to an ethnic minority in the UK, who were vulnerable to discrimination by nature of their ethnicity too. As one participant explained, her mother's decision not to challenge the religious institution when they ignored her disclosure of sexual abuse was influenced by her previous experiences as a black woman. She explained:

> *[I] began to realise that the choices that [my] mother had, as a black woman, living in the UK, in the 1980s, with three teeny children, were limited, very limited.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants' family dynamics

More common amongst the participants' responses was a sense that they had come from families with dysfunctional relationships. Participants detailed problematic marital relationships between their parents, citing affairs, bullying, controlling behaviour and a fear of one parent by the other. Others talked of different family dynamic issues, involving the favouritism of certain siblings, feeling misunderstood by parents or an inability to discuss certain issues with them, for example. Numerous participants noted that their parents were busy, unavailable or were 'never really … interested' in them while growing up. Overall, the information participants shared about their families alluded to a sense of emotional distance.

Social isolation of participants

More generally, many participants described themselves as solitary children. One participant explained that he was *"quite withdrawn and very quiet as a child"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Some participants attributed this to a preference for activities such as reading but others recognised that this was likely the result of experiences such as bullying or issues within the family. A number of participants mentioned having no or few friends, describing themselves as 'misfits' or 'struggling socially'.

Chapter 4
Context and nature of the child sexual abuse

This chapter details the context and nature of the sexual abuse experienced by participants in religious contexts. Information is provided about the locations, timing and nature of the sexual abuse as well as details of who the perpetrators were and their roles in the religious institutions. Other types of (non-sexual) abuse that participants experienced in religious contexts are also reported. This chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- **What do people share about the nature of the child sexual abuse they experienced in religious contexts?**

4.1 Perpetrators

4.1.1 Quantitative information

Participants reported that they were most commonly sexually abused by clergy or church-related staff (81 per cent) but also described abuse within a religious institution by family members (8 per cent), educational staff (7 per cent) and 'others' (11 per cent, often members of the congregation or community).

The majority of participants reported being abused by a male perpetrator. Of those abused in a religious context 96 per cent spoke about a male perpetrator, similar to those abused in other contexts (93 per cent). A small proportion of participants abused in religious and non-religious contexts were abused by a female perpetrator (8 per cent and 7 per cent respectively)[7].

Information was collected regarding perpetrators' age and ethnicity. However, data are only available about these demographics in a small number of cases currently and are therefore insufficient for meaningful analysis.

4.1.2 Qualitative information

Most participants considered in the qualitative analysis were sexually abused by an individual with an official religious title, such as Priest, Vicar, Imam or Elder. The remaining sub-group of participants were abused by individuals with extracurricular or volunteering responsibilities, including those running choirs, youth clubs and religious classes. A number of perpetrators held an official religious role but also volunteered for activities that placed them around children, often in a one-on-one setting. Only one participant in this sample was abused by lay members of a religious community.

All participants recognised and talked about the high regard in which the perpetrators were held. There was a sense that perpetrators were often regarded as a 'prominent member of society'. One participant explained that the perpetrator who sexually abused him *"was charismatic and he was being lauded by the Church … He was well known, well regarded"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Some participants noted that perpetrators either had or went on to have long and respected careers in the religious institution – sometimes despite victims and survivors disclosing their experience of abuse. In two cases, perpetrators were in fact promoted shortly after suspicion was raised or disclosures had been made.

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[7] Please note that percentages relating to perpetrator characteristics may total over 100 per cent, as some participants spoke about more than one perpetrator.

4.2 Location and timing of abuse

4.2.1 Quantitative information

Out of the sample of 1,697 participants, 133 reported that sexual abuse took place within a religious institution. In these cases, Church of England and Catholic institutions were most commonly cited, with Jehovah's Witnesses the third most frequent (see Figure 4.1). In 16 per cent of these cases the religious denomination was not specified by participants.

Some participants also shared that they were sexually abused by clergy or church-related staff in a non-religious institution. Of the 153 participants abused by clergy or church-related staff, 16 per cent reported that the abuse took place in a school and for 6 per cent abuse took place in a welfare institution.

4.2.2 Qualitative information

Most participants were abused during activities associated with the religious institution. Some experienced abuse while supporting religious leaders, for example during altar duties, sacristy preparations or counting mass collections. Others experienced abuse before or during religious classes or extracurricular activities. For a number of participants, the religious institution also served as a social centre and they were also abused during activities conducted outside of the institution, such as day trips or sleepovers. Abuse also took place in perpetrators' homes and cars, participants' homes or in multiple locations.

Given the location and timing of the sexual abuse outlined here, it is clear that many perpetrators had regular opportunities to see the victim and survivor alone. Some perpetrators were involved in multiple aspects of the victims and survivors' lives because the religious institution functioned as the centre point of some communities. In such cases, perpetrators had access to the participants' schools, social activities and homes if they were friends with the victims and survivors' parents or families.
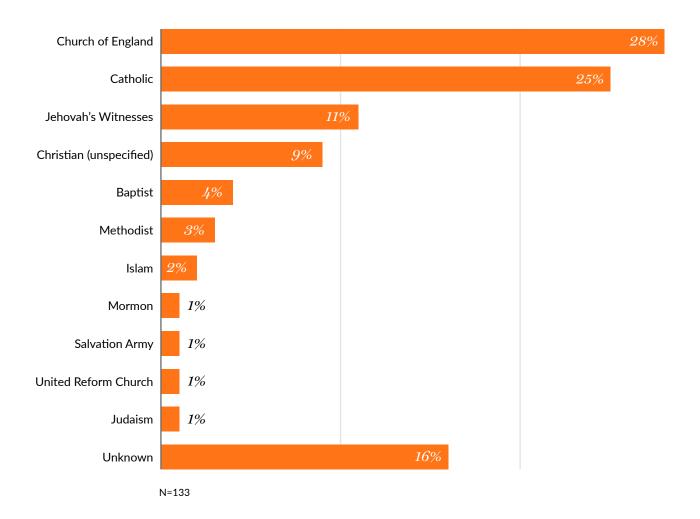
4.3 Nature of abuse

4.3.1 Quantitative information

In terms of the types of sexual abuse experienced, participants abused in religious contexts spoke most often about fondling (62 per cent) followed by other forms of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact (34 per cent). This contrasts slightly with abuse that occurred in other contexts, where participants most often talked about fondling (54 per cent) and penetrative abuse (50 per cent) (see Figure 4.2).

4.3.2 Qualitative information

The sexual abuse of many participants followed one of two circumstantial changes. The first involved relocation, whereby the families of victims and survivors relocated to a new area or perpetrators moved into the local community. The second involved participants taking up new extracurricular activities connected to the religious institution.
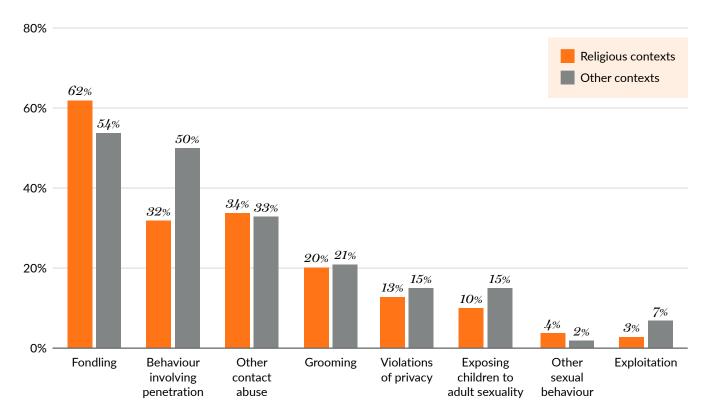
Figure 4.1   Denomination of institution where sexual abuse took place

Denomination	Percentage
Church of England	28%
Catholic	25%
Jehovah's Witnesses	11%
Christian (unspecified)	9%
Baptist	4%
Methodist	3%
Islam	2%
Mormon	1%
Salvation Army	1%
United Reform Church	1%
Judaism	1%
Unknown	16%

N=133

Some participants were groomed during the onset of the abuse they experienced, which typically took the form of contrived emotional support. They were singled out, made to feel special and that the perpetrator was genuinely interested in them. One participant talked about how the perpetrator positioned himself as the primary confidant in her life at the time and others talked about perpetrators spending time with them. Some participants described how they were shown kindness, attention, encouragement and support.

Participants spoke of how family members and members of the wider religious community were also groomed as perpetrators purposefully built strong relationships with them. Multiple participants described the perpetrator as a family friend prior to the onset of the sexual abuse they experienced. One participant explained that *"people such as the choirmaster are incredibly clever and devious – around how they build relationships with not only me but also parents. Nothing is too much trouble"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Figure 4.2   Type of sexual abuse experienced

Legend:
- Religious contexts (orange)
- Other contexts (grey)

Type	Religious contexts	Other contexts
Fondling	62%	54%
Behaviour involving penetration	32%	50%
Other contact abuse	34%	33%
Grooming	20%	21%
Violations of privacy	13%	15%
Exposing children to adult sexuality	10%	15%
Other sexual behaviour	4%	2%
Exploitation	3%	7%

N= 183 (religious contexts) / 1,514 (other contexts)

Note: Percentages total over 100 per cent as some participants reported more than one type of sexual abuse. Percentages here relate to the overall sample.

Grooming also often continued once the sexual abuse had begun. A number of participants recalled being granted special privileges by the perpetrator. This included being asked to complete special tasks, starring in plays and attending special day trips. The same participants were also rewarded with small gifts.

Almost all of the participants described the abuse as starting slowly and escalating progressively. Many of the participants described the abuse beginning with acts such as sitting on the perpetrator's knee or being cuddled. Others described the perpetrator initially touching their back or hair. Some experiences began verbally, with perpetrators commenting on their appearance, openly objectifying them or asking the victim and survivor if they loved them. In all cases, these initial experiences moved on to sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact, including kissing and groping, or fondling – the three acts most commonly described by this group of participants. Some participants were both touched by and made to touch the individuals who abused them. A number of participants' abuse included nudity, masturbation and penetrative acts.

4.4 Duration of abuse

4.4.1 Quantitative information

Some participants who attended the Truth Project talked about multiple, distinct episodes of sexual abuse. The number of episodes of abuse reported was the same for participants abused in religious contexts and those abused in other contexts (70 per cent spoke about one episode with 30 per cent talking about two or more).

Some participants reported a single instance of abuse and others reported abuse that lasted for many years. Participants abused in religious contexts reported an average duration of 4 years of abuse, with participants abused in other contexts reporting an average of 4.5 years.

4.4.2 Qualitative information

Most of the participants explained that the sexual abuse ended when their parents stopped actively encouraging them to attend specific religious activities. This indirect response often followed participants disclosing the abuse to their parents or parents sensing that something was wrong, either from witnessing their child's distress or hearsay within the community. One participant explained:

> *Eventually, one night I cried myself to sleep, the pillow was wet with the tears and I believe my father may have seen it. I wasn't pressured to go again but nothing was discussed as to what was up with me, why I was so distraught.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context
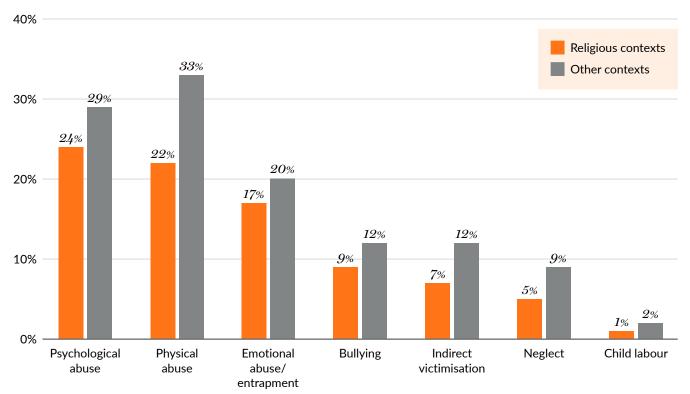
This was a common sentiment; none of the participants describe being actively prevented from engaging with the religious institution or perpetrator. Some described the sexual abuse ending due to circumstantial factors such as the perpetrator relocating, the victim leaving home or reaching an age where they were no longer required to attend religious classes. The abuse was only directly and intentionally stopped in a few cases. Two participants described how they confronted the individuals who had abused them and told them they had to stop. One explained:

> *I remember going to see him and saying to him, 'This has got to stop because it's not right and it's hurting me. I feel terrible. I can't cope with this.'*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Figure 4.3 Other forms of abuse experienced

N= 183 (religious contexts) / 1,514 (other contexts)

Note: Percentages may total over 100 per cent as some participants may report experiencing more than one other form of abuse. Percentages here relate to the overall sample.

4.5   Additional experiences of abuse

4.5.1   Quantitative information

In some cases, participants reported experiencing child sexual abuse alongside other forms of abuse by the same perpetrator, such as physical and emotional abuse, and neglect. A lower proportion of people abused in religious contexts talked about other forms of abuse that took place alongside the sexual abuse compared to their counterparts (41 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). In particular, fewer participants abused in a religious context spoke about physical abuse (Figure 4.3).

4.5.2   Qualitative information

Only two participants reported experiencing additional sexual abuse outside of the religious context. One was sexually abused by another child and the other was physically and sexually abused by her father.

Chapter 5

Institutional context and knowledge of the child sexual abuse

This chapter describes the characteristics and features of the religious institutions and how these facilitated the perpetration of child sexual abuse. It considers what knowledge institutions, and the individuals within them, had about abuse that was occurring at the time. In doing so, this chapter considers the research sub-questions:

- **How much did members of religious institutions know about what was happening?**

- **What have victims and survivors said about whether anything could have been done by the religious institutions at the time to prevent the sexual abuse?**

5.1   Institutional characteristics

5.1.1   Qualitative information

Participants' accounts described the characteristics of the religious institutions and communities in which the sexual abuse occurred. They described closed, insular religious institutions which were central to their communities, some having control and influence over all aspects of the lives of victims and their families. For example, this influence could extend to schools, housing, provision of community and medical services, as the following comment demonstrates:

> *I have also found out that some of the elders in the [location] congregation work for the local authority [council name and job centre name] and they have and still are using their jobs to underhandedly evict myself and my mother from our home, which I have proof of. There are also members within [location] congregation that work for Social Services in [location] and have underhandedly tried to have my mother wrongly sectioned even though we have proof that she had no mental health issues.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

In these communities participants reported that the power of the church or religious institution was significant. As identified in Chapter 4, participants described how both the religious institutions and those who served in them were viewed as a higher authority and consequently garnered privilege, respect and reverence by the nature of this position. One participant explained how it was a privilege for her to be asked by the vicar to help out after services (where the abuse took place) and how she had no choice but to go:

> *I came to dread these Sunday afternoons but my parents didn't or couldn't listen when I suggested that I didn't really like it and didn't want to go, it was an honour for me to be asked and I had to go. End of story.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

In this environment participants described how individual perpetrators were afforded trust and high standing, where their actions were never questioned and their ability to abuse never contemplated:

> *To my mother, that [perpetrator] was God's representative on Earth.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *I don't want to be so banal as to say a person in a position of trust, but there was something idealistic about [perpetrator] and something that everyone idolised about him. This behaviour was just not part of the picture you had of him really.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants described how this religious authority and associated trust extended beyond the religious institution, allowing the perpetrators access to their homes, schools and social circles.

According to participants' accounts, the culture of the religious institution was also an enabling factor in the sexual abuse. Some participants reported cultures dominated by male control, where men held all positions of responsibility and were the decision makers in the religious institution. In some cases the responsibility to protect themselves was placed upon children or sexual harassment in the congregation was normalised. For example, one participant described how it was the norm for some male members of the congregation to sexually harass the women. Religious leaders were also seen as unquestionable and untouchable.

Participants recounted how the reputation of the religious community was seen as paramount and to be protected at all costs. This meant that when the sexual abuse was disclosed or discovered, religious leaders and communities would protect the reputation of the institution to the detriment of the protection of children, as this participant described:

> *... I think they care more about their reputation, how the church comes across, the community ... I think maybe they are worried about how that [child sexual abuse scandal] damages it.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Religious leaders were described as using a range of strategies to protect this reputation and prevent the sexual abuse being reported elsewhere, including intimidation, offering pay-offs and discrediting victims and witnesses.

> *[It's] a cover-up. Nobody talks about it, he's the one, if he talks about it, that gets the blame, and the shame attached, and life goes on for your abuser, and he goes to the [place of worship] two times a week, and everybody thinks he's a wonderful person, and if you want your faith, and it means that much to you, you suck it up.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants also described how congregation and community members would also protect the institution and its reputation. Some participants described how they were harassed, threatened and intimidated by others in the religious community after they disclosed the abuse they experienced.

5.2   Enabling characteristics of religious institutions

5.2.1   Qualitative information

Some institutional characteristics and practices that facilitated the perpetration of sexual abuse were identified in participants' accounts. For example, they described how adults were able to spend time alone with individual children when engaging in church-related activity, such as when providing them with additional support in religious or musical instruction; sexual harassment was normalised in some religious communities and child protection training messages were altered to fit the agenda of the religious institution. One participant referred to the 'open door' culture of their religious community which meant that strangers could easily come in and out of the community, into their homes and be part of institutional activities. Some participants said there was a general lack of awareness around child sexual abuse and child protection at the time they were abused. No protective features of institutions were discussed by any of the participants in their accounts.

Participants reported that after becoming aware of the child sexual abuse they experienced, the religious institutions responded in ways that also enabled further abuse of the participants themselves or of other children. Participants explained how perpetrators were protected and forgiven for their behaviour and that religious leaders were more concerned about the perpetrator than the victims:

> *The difference is, nobody's coming forward, and it's not being dealt with, and predators, if you're going to call them that, are – can operate with relative impunity; you know, they know that they're relatively – you know, they're protected, they know people won't go to the police, they know that they can do what they want, pretty safely.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *Thinking back to conversations, they were even protected or it was covered up, don't talk about it, move on, he's been moved on, that I just can't reconcile that. That's the thing. There's this sense from them of forgiveness, but I could never forgive them. Never.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Several participants spoke of perpetrators being moved on to other areas, sometimes overseas, where they continued to work with children in the religious community. Participants either knew this was the case at the time or found out later as adults after reporting the sexual abuse to the police.

> *They [the highest authority for that religious group] didn't know what had been done to me, and yet the local church knew, which is why he left the country. He confessed in front of witnesses and still, the authorities are saying they had no idea. Well, what happened in [country overseas]? Did it happen there? Was it kept quiet again? And that's what's really worrying.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants understood that concerns and information about the perpetrator were not shared with other churches and religious organisations or reported to the police, leaving the risk of future sexual abuse unmanaged. Some participants explained that the concerns were not always escalated within the religious institution itself, instead being dealt with at local level only. Some participants also referred to what they perceived to be 'cover ups' within the institution and potentially between the institution and the police. Participants from particularly closed religious communities also described how inquiries by external agencies would be hindered by community members and leaders.

> *... the systems and protections and – are very, very thorough, and you've got the DBS, you've got staff checks, there's near constant staff training on child protection, and it's all very, very thorough; everybody's alert, everybody knows what to do. But that's all in the mainstream, you know public institutions if you want to call it that. And then, you know, but there's the whole other area of communities that are not part of that, and all this protection of children is just almost totally blank and absent from these communities.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

5.3   Institutional knowledge at the time

5.3.1   Quantitative information

Just over a third of participants sexually abused in a religious context reported that someone else knew that the abuse was happening at the time (34 per cent). This is similar to the proportion of people who reported that someone knew the abuse was happening in cases not involving a religious context (32 per cent).

The percentage of participants sexually abused in a religious context who knew of someone else being abused in the same institution was higher than for those abused in a non-religious context. Of the participants abused in a religious context, almost half (48 per cent) shared that they knew of someone else being abused in the same institution. In comparison, of the participants who were abused in a non-religious context, 35 per cent knew of someone else being abused in the same institution.

5.3.2   Qualitative information

Most participants knew or firmly believed that the religious institution was aware of the abuse and the perpetrator's behaviour at the time, some having this confirmed by the police when they made reports as adults. The fact that perpetrators left their congregations quickly, without warning or 'under a cloud' and that attempts were made to discredit the victims were regarded by participants as indicators that the institutions knew.

> *I cannot believe that the [denomination] Church hierarchy was unaware of his [perpetrator] make up.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Where participants knew the institutions were aware of the sexual abuse at the time, they explained how disclosures were not treated seriously enough or the gravity of the situation was not properly understood by religious leaders. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Some participants knew of other children who were being sexually abused at the time but said that they did not talk about what was happening amongst themselves. Other participants were not aware that other children were also abused at the time and only found out when reporting to the police as adults. One participant describes how he suspected other altar boys were also being abused when he was because of the way their behaviour changed:

> " *Not long after we'd started, maybe within months, their behaviour changed. One of them became very shy and introvert whereas, another one, became quite violent and lashed out a lot. I don't know with certainty, but maybe they were too.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

In addition to other children being aware, participants recounted how other adults knew or suspected that they were being sexually abused at the time. Participants described how their parents, particularly mothers, knew or suspected they were being abused but did not act directly to report or stop what was happening.

> " *People knew. My mother knew. But nobody would have believed it. We lived in a village of 250 people. If anything had been said about this wonderful vicar, it wouldn't have been him who'd left. It would have been us who'd had to leave. 'These dreadful people who moved here from [city], they need to go'.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants believed that their parents may have noticed behaviour changes but never spoke to them about it, although some did try to protect their children to some extent, for example by no longer expecting their children to engage in further activities with the perpetrator, by sending them away to stay with other family members for a while or by telling the victims not to talk to the suspected perpetrator. It is also possible that some parents may have taken action and spoken to the religious institution or other parents at the time but that the participants themselves were never aware of this.

One participant recalled how as a child his parents had asked him directly if he was being sexually abused but how he denied it at the time and they never mentioned it again:

> " *... when I told my parents last September [as an adult], they weren't shocked. They kind of went, 'We thought something was going on. We asked you once or twice, you couldn't remember.' I denied it flatly, which is always the way, isn't it?*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants believed the failure of their parents to act or report the abuse at the time was as a result of the power the individual perpetrator or religious institution had over the family and community. One participant described how such was the hold the perpetrator had upon him and his family that after his parents became aware of the abuse, the perpetrator came to the family home and physically exposed himself in front of the participant and his parents and then left. The participant's parents never discussed the matter thereafter.

Some participants explained they did not blame other adults for not acting at the time as they perceived they were also manipulated by the perpetrator, lacked understanding of abuse or could not stand up to the control and influence of the perpetrator or religious institution:

> *Nothing would have come of it, of course, [in specific year in 1970s]. Nothing could – I don't blame, them, actually. I don't blame them for not doing anything because it hadn't – the news about the Catholic Church in America hadn't made any headlines so nobody knew that this happened. Nobody would have believed it. Nobody.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *I honestly believe they had no idea how to deal with it. I honestly believe that, you know, and that isn't to defend them. I just think that they have no idea, and if they do, they don't care. But the three elders that dealt with that on the day, I don't think they knew what to do … They had no training, no safeguarding policy.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

In some instances other professionals, such as doctors and social workers, knew but did not act in a way that stopped the sexual abuse. Some participants mentioned how other adults in the community knew about the abuse, for example a member of the congregation warned the victim's parents about the perpetrator in one case and in another the parents of another victim knew but did not want to make a fuss in the community so simply removed their child from that religious group.

The institutional structures and characteristics that increased the risk of sexual victimisation in religious institutions were common to those found in other research. For example, recent German studies (Dreßing et al., 2018) also reported that religious leaders accused of child sexual abuse were transferred to new areas rather than confronted with official Canon or criminal proceedings. Similarly, the Inquiry's *Child sexual abuse within the Catholic and Anglican Churches: A rapid evidence assessment* and the Australian Royal Commission reports discuss how attitudes to sexuality in religious institutions have also been found to contribute to the occurrence of child sexual abuse (IICSA Research Team, 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Religious institutions have been less likely to have training on child protection and abuse or sex education programmes for example. The German studies also highlighted that even in cases where religious institutions had introduced such training, not all individuals who ought to have completed it had done so (Dreßing et al., 2018).

Chapter 6

Experiences of disclosure and responses by institutions

The first part of this chapter presents information about participants' experiences of disclosing the sexual abuse, both as children and as adults, and the impact of the responses upon them. The barriers to disclosure shared by participants are also reported. The second part of the chapter describes participants' experiences of the police and criminal justice system after disclosing or reporting the abuse. The research sub-questions addressed in this chapter are:

- **What were victims and survivors' experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse (as a child/adult) that occurred in a religious context and what has helped or hindered disclosure?**

- **How were disclosures or allegations of child sexual abuse in religious contexts responded to by those within and outside institutions?**

6.1 Experiences of disclosure and impacts as a child

6.1.1 Quantitative information

Disclosing sexual abuse can be very challenging; some children may not report it for many years or even at all. Quantitative analysis showed that fewer participants who had been abused in a religious context told someone about the abuse at the time it was happening than those in other contexts; 68 per cent shared that they did not tell anyone at the time. In comparison, 54 per cent of participants who were abused in other contexts did not disclose the abuse at the time.

In almost half of the 52 cases that were reported at the time, participants reported disclosing to a person in authority inside the institution (48 per cent) such as a member of the clergy or safeguarding officer. This is higher than similar disclosures for participants abused in other contexts (29 per cent). Participants also reported disclosing the abuse to police and welfare protection officers; however they did this less frequently than participants who had been abused in a non-religious context. This information can be seen in Figure 6.1. Participants abused in a religious context also spoke about disclosing to parents (44 per cent), child friends (8 per cent), people providing a mental health service (6 per cent) and medical personnel (4 per cent) at the time the sexual abuse was happening.

Where the sexual abuse took place within a religious context, participants frequently shared that they did not report the abuse they experienced at the time it was happening due to feelings of shame and embarrassment (37 per cent, compared to 21 per cent of people abused in other contexts).
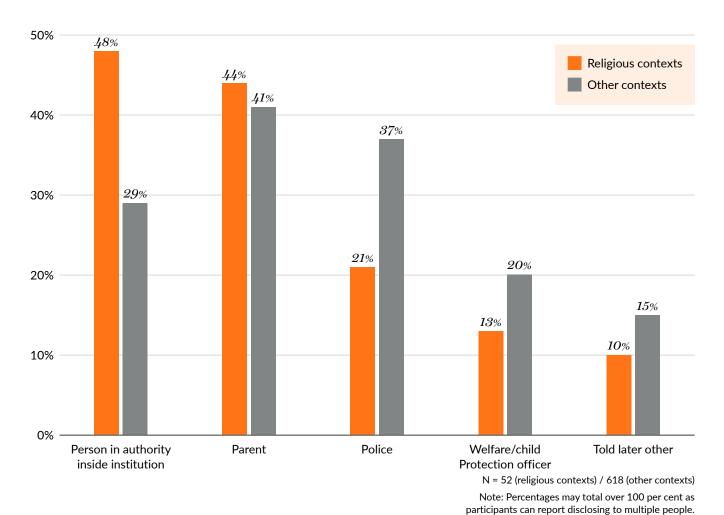
6.1.2 Qualitative information

A reluctance to report sexual abuse was echoed in the qualitative research findings. Where victims and survivors from this sample had actually reported the abuse to the religious institution at the time, little or no action was taken by the adults they had disclosed to:

> " *I was quite reassured that something was going to happen. I didn't know what, but something, after all this time, was going to happen. Waited, waited, waited, nothing happened.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Figure 6.1 Who sexual abuse was most frequently reported to (when it was reported at the time)

Legend: Religious contexts (orange), Other contexts (grey)

Category	Religious contexts	Other contexts
Person in authority inside institution	48%	29%
Parent	44%	41%
Police	21%	37%
Welfare/child Protection officer	13%	20%
Told later other	10%	15%

N = 52 (religious contexts) / 618 (other contexts)

Note: Percentages may total over 100 per cent as participants can report disclosing to multiple people.

Where victims and survivors had tried to tell someone what was happening in a more indirect way or where there were evident changes in their behaviour, they were not asked any further questions to find out more about what was going on. As one participant explained, *"I did intimate that something wasn't quite right, and again, nothing happened"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Some participants found the disclosures they made as children were minimised or disbelieved by the adults and institutions they told.

Where the sexual abuse was reported to the religious institution at the time, some participants described how their reports were not taken seriously and no action was taken. Others faced an 'inquisition' of questioning and were made to recount the disclosure over and over again to groups of male religious leaders. Participants reported being blamed themselves or discredited for making allegations. In other instances victims were told not to talk about such things and to just get on with their lives, as the following participant's experience of disclosing to another vicar in the church where he was abused describes:

> **"** *He said I was going through a phase and I shouldn't talk about it and it was a sin ... the talking about things, sexual things.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants spoke of how some perpetrators were questioned by religious leaders but after giving their reassurances they remained in their positions or were given positions of further responsibility. Reports were not made to the police or escalated to higher levels within the church or religious community by religious leaders. There was an apparent contradiction in several cases between victims and survivors being told they were not believed or being actively discredited and the perpetrators being moved elsewhere.

Participants were also ostracised and intimidated by other members of their religious community following their disclosure.

Some participants explained how they had told other professionals about the abuse, or indicated something was wrong, but they also failed to act to protect them:

> **"** *And also, the vicar would come and take me out from hospital and I said to the sister, who was also an Irish Catholic, 'Can you send the vicar away, because I don't want to see him.' And her response to that was, 'What harm can he do? He's a priest'.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

There were many barriers preventing participants from disclosing their experience of sexual abuse when they were children, some of which have already been discussed in this report.

A particular barrier discussed was the high standing of the perpetrators which placed them in such a position of power. Some victims and survivors recognised this power imbalance in the context of their own religious practices. For example, one victim and survivor remembered *"having to confess my sins to this man ... which all seemed a bit sick to me"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Others talked about this power imbalance by recognising that, as religious individuals, perpetrators were imbued with a sense of inherent authority. As a result, their parents and family often trusted the perpetrator without question. Similarly, communities did not question or challenge religious individuals, even in cases where suspicion had been raised. One victim and survivor was frustrated that *"nobody asked any questions"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context] and another explained that the culture in her religious community was such that *"you just don't say anything against [religious leaders]"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Additional barriers reported by participants were the lack of a relationship with a trusted adult or being unable to tell anyone as they did not know how to explain it or did not have the language to do so. A lack of education and understanding about sex and abuse also meant some victims did not recognise that what was happening to them was wrong. Participants also talked about feeling unable to tell anyone about the abuse due to the power and influence of the religious community or the perpetrator themselves. They feared the potential impact upon their families.

Participants who did disclose at the time recounted the impacts of the experience. For example they described being very sad and suffering mental health impacts, some even being suicidal as children:

> *I was left thinking they either didn't believe me or they didn't care. I was never the kind of child who was going to bring it up myself. So by the time I was twelve I was suicidal.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some felt disbelieved and uncared for by their families and others. One participant described how this left her with a life-long feeling of being disbelieved. Another participant described how he lost his religious faith after disclosing the sexual abuse he had experienced to another clergyman who did nothing about it:

> *I just couldn't believe how he was. And he was very composed and matter of fact about it and I was talking about stuff that had been going on, but he was just, 'It will pass, don't talk about things', and, 'You can't assume things are happening to others.'*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

6.2 Experiences of disclosure and impacts after the abuse had ended/as an adult

6.2.1 Quantitative information

Although rates of reporting sexual abuse at the time it was happening were relatively low, a high percentage of participants abused in a religious context told someone about the abuse after it ended (85 per cent), similar to participants who were abused in a non-religious context (82 per cent).

As with experiences of disclosing abuse as a child, participants sexually abused in a religious context often reported their experience of abuse to someone in authority inside the institution (32 per cent, compared to 7 per cent of participants abused in other contexts).

When reporting child sexual abuse after it had ended, participants abused in a religious context most frequently shared that they had disclosed to police (60 per cent). In comparison, 54 per cent of participants reporting abuse in a non-religious context disclosed to the police. Participants abused in a religious context also spoke about disclosing the abuse after it had ended to a variety of other people, including staff in mental health services, family members and partners (Table 6.1).

Our analysis of the 139 participants sexually abused in a religious context who disclosed the abuse after it ended showed a mixture of responses. Where the sexual abuse was reported to a person in authority inside the institution, participants often described receiving an inadequate or muted response with no action being taken by the institution to address the disclosure. However, some participants also shared positive experiences where they had received support from the institution both in terms of accessing support services and reporting the abuse to the police. Participants who reported the abuse to the police also received a mixed response, as discussed further in section 6.3.

Table 6.1   Disclosures of sexual abuse made after the abuse had ended

Who sexual abuse was reported to after it ended (if abuse was reported)	Religious context	Non-religious context
Police	60%	54%
Person in authority inside institution	32%	7%
Parent	10%	15%
Other person	9%	7%
Person providing mental health service (including counsellor, psychologist)	8%	19%
Partner (including boyfriend/girlfriend)	8%	10%
Adult friend	4%	6%
Other relative	4%	6%
Medical personnel (eg doctor, nurse)	2%	6%
Sibling	2%	5%
Welfare/child protection officer	1%	6%
Child friend	0%	1%
Unknown	1%	1%
Total (number)	**139**	**1,109**

Note: Percentages may total over 100 per cent as participants can report disclosing to multiple people.

6.2.2   Qualitative information

In describing their experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse in religious contexts as adults, participants in the qualitative sample spoke about the process of disclosure being challenging, frustrating and disappointing. They recounted being let down by the religious communities and other authorities, with insufficient action taken by authorities in dealing with, and responding to, their disclosures.

> *I did go to the then parish priest when I was older, I believe in my late twenties and gave him the details of the abuse I had suffered under his predecessor but he didn't take notes and I realised he wasn't going to proceed any further, but at least I had said my piece.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants described experiencing secondary and repeated victimisation as a result of the way in which religious institutions and other authorities responded or failed to respond to them:

> *I feel the church repeatedly re-victimised me with their cover-ups; ineptly dealing with my further complaints by addressing me only publicly and later unreasonably refusing damages payment.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants relayed how their own character was challenged by institutions or that they were 'fobbed off' by the religious institution which took limited or no action following their disclosures:

> *Two years ago, I can't remember exactly when, I went to see the relevant contact person at the diocese of [area] but I felt I was pretty much fobbed off with a cup of tea and biscuits and the offer of a chat with a counsellor.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants described how they rarely received any follow-up or contact from the institution after reporting, or how they had to persistently contact and chase the institution to try to find out information and ensure action was being taken.

> *And then he never got back to me at all. Nothing. Nothing back. No return call, no missed calls, no messages, no letters, nothing. It was as if this meeting hadn't happened. So I kind of gave up on it.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Participants spoke about religious institutions and other authorities continuing to protect the perpetrator and the reputation and financial assets of the institution at the cost of supporting the victims and survivors of sexual abuse:

> *The thing that I found really, really, really offensive was, was that she [head teacher of school where abuser was still working] said to pursue any more questioning against [abuser], the guy who abused me, would be to be breaching his human rights. And I thought, 'What about my human rights? You're treating me –' All the way through I felt as though they were just stonewalling me; side-lining me, yeah? Using – refusing to give information, yeah, that was reasonably asked, yeah? And that – dreadful, yeah? So that was ... I finally gave up.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants were upset by the difference between the public responses and apologies being made by the church or religious community about child sexual abuse and the private treatment and lack of response they were receiving as individuals having been abused within that community. For example, one participant was particularly angry and hurt by the fact that the religious institution in which he was abused took to making public statements about their failure in relation to sexual abuse but failed to engage with him personally to make an apology.

Participants also spoke about unhelpful responses to their disclosures from other professionals. One participant explained how she had disclosed to various GPs over the years as an adult but that it took 10 years for one doctor to help her to recognise that what had happened to her was rape and finally arrange for her to see a sexual abuse specialist.

Describing barriers to disclosing as adults, participants explained they did not want their families to find out and they feared hostility from the religious community, including potential risks to their families, lifestyles and livelihoods. Past experience of being unable to successfully challenge religious institutions meant some participants thought it would be pointless to report the abuse as adults. One participant described how she wanted to tell people about her experiences as a child but that people just did not want to know about it.

In terms of a more positive response, one participant explained how the support of a specialist charity had helped her to finally report the abuse she experienced many years after it happened.

In describing the impacts of their disclosures made as adults, participants conveyed their ongoing frustration and disappointment with the religious institutions. In some instances participants faced further animosity from members of their religious community, including harassment and intimidation, as one participant explains:

> " *I was being followed, I was threatened. It was to the extent that when I went down to [city] to visit friends, I was being followed down, all the way to [city]. They were hiring private investigators to follow me. My job was threatened because I was working within the community as a [profession]. That if I fed in with all the allegations, I would lose my job; a dossier of information about me would be put around the community and hung up and distributed that would embarrass me.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The experiences of disclosure described by the Truth Project participants above are also reflected in the findings of the Australian Royal Commission, the Inquiry's REA and the German studies discussed above, which similarly reported how victims and survivors of sexual abuse in religious institutions did not disclose as children. They also found that when reports were made to religious institutions their specific systems of internal law often prevented appropriate responses to the disclosures of child sexual abuse (Dreßing et al., 2018; IICSA Research Team, 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). These existing reports also detail that religious institutions have dealt with allegations of sexual abuse internally and not passed information on to civil authorities and the police, reflecting the same tendency to secrecy and the protection of the reputation of the religion and its institutions as demonstrated in our research findings here. There are also similar research findings across the reports regarding the focus on forgiveness and repentance of perpetrators and a consequent unwillingness of religious leaders to remove perpetrators from their clerical roles. Failures to warn other areas and institutions when staff are moved on have also been identified as a problem in these reports.

6.3 Experiences of the criminal justice system

6.3.1 Quantitative information

Participants who shared that they were sexually abused in religious contexts often disclosed the abuse to police as adults (60 per cent). The 84 participants in our quantitative sample who disclosed the abuse to police after it had ended reported receiving a mixture of responses. Many described negative experiences, with particular issues being the lack of communication from the police following their reports; police officers being dismissive towards them; and the case not being progressed due to a lack of evidence. However, some participants reported having good experiences, with officers handling their reports with sensitivity, making sure there was support available to them throughout the reporting process. These mixed experiences of the criminal justice system are similar to those of participants who had reported being sexually abused in other contexts.

6.3.2 Qualitative information

Among the sample used in our qualitative research no reports were made to the police about the sexual abuse in religious contexts when the participants were children. However, similar to the quantitative research findings, participants here also described mixed experiences when dealing with the police and criminal justice agencies as adults. Some participants had only reported their experience of sexual abuse to the police as they felt they had to rather than specifically for seeking justice for themselves. They did so to protect others, when they found out the perpetrator still had contact with children. Some were reluctant to report at all, expressing a lack of confidence in the police.

> *The responses of [area] police are rubbish. I don't want them digging in my life ... They'd make an absolute balls-up of it. I've got no confidence in that force whatsoever.*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The responses they received were influenced by the individual officers who dealt with the case. For example, one participant explained how unhelpful the response from the officer she first reported to was. The officer was unempathetic and told her not to cry. This made the participant reluctant to return and have any further police interviews. However, after that initial experience she subsequently dealt with a helpful, supportive and understanding detective, ***"The detective was lovely, she was wonderful"*** [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

The response of some officers made participants feel their disclosures were not seen as a priority or were minimised because they related to non-recent abuse or did not involve penetrative acts.

While some participants reported being believed by the police from the outset, others reported being disbelieved until further victims corroborated their allegations and for some this was not until after a long period of investigation. It was only then that action was taken to proceed with the case.

> *With the police investigation, they've said, sort of, you know, it could be that they don't have enough evidence this time, and it will be just be, maybe in 10 years' time somebody else will come forward ...*
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *We had this final session with the police officer and he says, 'I'm sorry. We don't really believe you. There's not much emotion or passion about how you're talking about this', and that sort of stuff really. He was just typically really I suppose of that time.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants made reference to individual police officers declaring their own religious affiliation to them when it was not necessary, making them uncomfortable or suspicious about how that might influence the investigation.

Participants described the general lack of support and consideration for victims throughout the criminal justice system given the process was set up to gather evidence and focussed on the perpetrator:

> *As a victim, the process isn't kind to you … And they care the most about the perpetrators, the criminals. You're just a witness to them, providing evidence. But really, I am the traumatised child telling my story.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

There were mixed experiences of support and communication throughout the process, with some participants not being kept up to date with how things were progressing, leaving them wondering and worrying about what was happening. This was a particular issue as the process was often a long and slow one which participants found difficult and frustrating. One participant explained how the officer investigating her case worked part-time and this caused long delays in contact:

> *I just wanted someone to say, 'It's okay, don't worry, we're still investigating, we're still sorting things out' … There was nobody who covered, there was no other case worker. Which I was like, this is really poor … I would email and then it would be weeks later she would get back to me and I would obviously be sitting there thinking, what's happening? I just want somebody to tell me it's okay.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

While some described the excellent support they received from individual officers or police liaison officers, others had little contact, no victim support provision or witness protection when they needed it.

A real challenge facing victims and survivors apparent in some accounts was having to cope with the court process itself, which was described as traumatic and unkind to victims and a process which was almost as abusive as the sexual abuse itself. Participants described the particular difficulty of facing cross-examination in court and how they were not always kept up to date with court proceedings or how court schedules could change at short notice causing uncertainty and anxiety. The following comment reflects one participant's experiences of being cross-examined by the defence barrister in court:

> *It was horrendous. It was awful. I thought, I never want to go through this again. Then when I had to go for a retrial I was like, wow, I can't do this.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

These negative experiences of the criminal justice system and court process meant that some participants were unsure whether they would recommend that other victims and survivors go through the process.

> I think though, what's happened with the police process is, how that went, it hasn't made me feel confident. If someone said to me, 'I've been sexually abused, shall I report it to the police?', there is part of me that would say no, because it's traumatic and dealing with their bureaucracy and red tape and just the way they process it. If something is to do with the police, being told – because it's historic, it's not a priority as if it was now. I'm like, okay, thanks.
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

These experiences of engaging with the criminal justice system as victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in religious contexts indicate that some participants may not have received the kind of support they are now entitled to under the Victims' Code. Under the Code, victims and survivors have a number of key rights, including the right to be kept informed about the progress of their case and to be referred to victims' support services (Ministry of Justice, 2015). The experiences also mirror those reported by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia (2017c). The Commission reported in its findings that there was evidence of the police paying undue deference to the church and their apparent reluctance to believe that members of the clergy could sexually abuse children. This led to investigations not being initiated at all or failures to conduct proper investigations.

Chapter 7

Impacts of the child sexual abuse

This chapter describes the range of impacts of the sexual abuse shared by participants and what has helped or hindered their recovery. It details the different types of impacts on victims and survivors as well as reporting on the wider impacts of the abuse on others, including participants' partners and families. The content of this chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- What are the impacts of child sexual abuse in religious contexts reported by victims and survivors?

7.1   Impacts of child sexual abuse in religious contexts

The impacts of child sexual abuse can be emotional and psychological, physical, social and sexual, behavioural, spiritual, educational and financial. They can vary considerably in their severity and can be short, medium or long-term. The quantitative analysis in this chapter examines these impacts by type. In the qualitative analysis impacts are also examined by type but the analysis also looks at how different types of impacts affected participants. A complete table of identified impacts can be found in Appendix A.

7.1.1   Direct impacts, consequences and mental health

Quantitative information
Accounts highlighted how differently victims and survivors were affected by the sexual abuse they experienced. The data from the quantitative analysis revealed that participants often talked about at least one negative impact on their lives (89 per cent of those abused in religious contexts and 93 per cent abused in other contexts). Figure 7.1 highlights the types of impacts reported.

For some children, the impacts of sexual abuse were immediate and could be identified through physical injuries to the body, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. One in ten participants sexually abused in religious contexts reported a direct consequence, compared to 16 per cent of those abused in other contexts. This may reflect the lower percentage of participants abused in religious contexts who experienced penetrative abuse.

Many participants described the detrimental impact the sexual abuse had on their mental health. Notable amongst those who had experienced abuse in a religious context were feelings of guilt (26 per cent) and loss of religious faith (18 per cent).

Qualitative information
Analysis of the qualitative cases also highlighted mental health impacts as the most notable type of impact amongst participants. Participants had experienced a wide range of mental health issues across various stages of their lives, some of which were ongoing.

Participants described experiencing depression, chronic worry, severe emotional distress, fear, anger, and being drained of energy in their childhood. Recollections of self-harm, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide were also salient in participants' accounts.

Figure 7.1   The impacts of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors

Legend:
- **Religious contexts** (orange)
- **Other contexts** (grey)

Category	Religious contexts	Other contexts
Mental health	81%	86%
Relationships	49%	51%
Sexual behaviour	37%	29%
School/employment	34%	46%
Direct consequence	11%	16%
Physical health	8%	6%
Criminal behaviour	7%	10%

N= 183 (religious contexts) / 1,514 (other contexts)

'Direct consequence' refers to pregnancy, physical injury or sexually transmitted disease

Note: Percentages total over 100 per cent as some participants shared more than one type of impact.

> *It is clear to me that the priest did untold damage to my psyche and caused me a world of anger and depression which simply would not have been there otherwise.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *… When you're a kid, you don't – you think you can take on the world, and then somebody does that, and you are literally drained of every single piece of energy, and you can't do anything.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The centrality of religious institutions in participants' lives, disconnected and fractured relationships with their parents, and their parents' community ties to the perpetrators meant that the mental health impacts on participants were compounded by the specific context of the abuse.

In addition to mental health impacts, participants also remembered exhibiting other behaviours which would likely have been out of character for them as children, such as wetting themselves and being hyperactive or overly animated.

Adolescence and young adulthood was often the time when many participants said that they 'went off the rails' or 'reached crisis point'. Many of the mental health impacts experienced as a child, such as suicide attempts and self-harm, continued into this part of their lives or for those sexually abused in teenage years were just starting.

> " *I became obsessed with cutting my legs and my arms. And it was more my face. Because he would constantly say 'You're so pretty' and this and that and he would pull my cheeks. I would start scratching and pinching my face and trying to disfigure my face. I have got the scars on my face. Because I thought, if I don't look pretty, he won't touch me, he won't kiss me.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> " *I've taken several overdoses, tried to throw myself off a bridge, all as a teenager.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The negative impact on participants' mental health in adolescence and early adulthood had sometimes been exacerbated by the burden of having to lie to family members or having to deal with negative responses of family to their disclosure. Participants discussed being caught between not being believed about the sexual abuse and being held accountable for it. Dealing with mental health issues in adolescence and early adulthood also had a knock-on effect on other areas of participants' lives, such as employment.

In the longer term, participants described mental health impacts (along with other impacts) as something they have had to endure throughout their lives. Many were still overwhelmed by it and were having to manage it every day. *"It's like living with a demon"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

A strong sense of sadness was expressed in terms of what participants considered their lives could have been like and what they had missed out on because of their experience.

The loss of religious faith and associated sense of community reported by participants emerged as a specific impact for this cohort of participants. They were unable to reconcile their religious beliefs with being sexually abused by someone they saw as a representative of God. Some participants were having to mentally come to terms with being forced to leave their faith, family and wider religious community.

> " *I've lost my faith ... I was an outstanding [member of religious community] up until the age of 16 ... If people had have just left alone, or if the abuse hadn't happened, I'd be married to an elder, I'd have a lovely little, spiritual little family ... I've had to reinvent myself.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

For one participant, who went on to become a priest, the experience of sexual abuse in a religious context had the opposite effect. He invested more in his faith as a way of seeking to drive positive change. He explained, *"I do [enjoy being a priest] because I can do something about the institution from the inside out and I love God. [The abuse] was about [the perpetrator], not about God"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Participants reported other longer term mental health impacts of depression, bipolar disorder, ongoing feelings of guilt, self-doubt, anger, emptiness and having a lack of self-confidence, self-worth, assertiveness and motivation. Excessive crying, flashbacks, nightmares, sleeping problems, and memory loss connected to the experience were all cited in participants' accounts along with having an altered sense of self.

> *I think in terms of everything from my standard of living to the way society looks at me, the way I can look at myself. The way friends and family look at me has been drastically altered because of that one man.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

7.1.2   Relationships and sexual behaviour

Quantitative information

Many participants shared how their experience of child sexual abuse had subsequently impacted their relationships and sexual behaviour.

Around half (49 per cent) of the participants sexually abused in a religious context reported an impact on their relationships, which is similar to those abused in other contexts (51 per cent). Difficulties with trust and intimacy was the most commonly cited impact on relationships for participants abused in a religious context (35 per cent) and for participants abused in other contexts (34 per cent).

A higher percentage of participants sexually abused in religious contexts reported an impact on their sexual behaviour compared to those abused in other contexts (37 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). This difference was particularly notable in the avoidance of sexual intimacy reported by participants (19 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

Qualitative information

The experience of child sexual abuse impacted on participants' relationships with parents, wider family members, friendship groups and partners and led to difficulties forming new friendships and intimate relationships.

As children, adolescents and young adults, participants described the difficulties they had building close relationships with their parents, with the experience of sexual abuse straining these relationships further. This was particularly the case where parents disbelieved or disregarded participants' disclosures out of shame. Being sexually abused by a male(s) also negatively impacted on how participants viewed other male family members and other male children and young people. A participant abused within the Muslim community described how this also altered relationships with other male children and young people studying within the same mosque.

Adolescence and young adulthood was typically characterised by having no family ties, being shunned by family, ostracised from friendship groups, and feeling alienated in or forced to abandon their communities. Participants also described struggling with forming and maintaining positive intimate relationships at this point in their lives:

> *Meeting this young man was a good thing at the time, but I couldn't cope with the feelings that it was evoking.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some also described exhibiting what they deemed 'risky' or 'promiscuous' sexual behaviours, particularly in their adolescent years:

> " *Even after [the abuse], part of my whole sort of sexual identity was about trying to work stuff out. I'm sure I made – not sure, I know I made bad judgements, bad errors and all sorts of stuff really. So after a little while outside of [the abuse], there had been other encounters that I'd have had that would have been careless.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

In their adult lives, participants often remained outcast from their family and communities, with some victims and survivors stating that parents blamed them for the sexual abuse, accused them of 'causing trouble' and did not offer them any support. Some had very limited or no familial ties at all. For some, new friendship groups in adulthood had become a form of alternative family but others talked of having a general lack of social relationships and friends. Difficulties with intimate relationships were common:

> " *Up until probably my late, mid to late 20s, I struggled to hold down relationships. Relationships, intimacy felt awkward. Intimacy still does feel awkward.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> " *I don't trust people, I don't let people in. I certainly wouldn't have a relationship with a man. It's not going to happen. I sort of wanted it for a long time, but it's never going to happen and it's good that it's not going to happen because frankly I'd only make somebody else miserable and they'd make me miserable too.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Impacts on relationships with their own or other children were also reported in participants' adult lives. Some talked about having an overprotective parenting style or being overprotective of other children in their lives. One female participant had asked to be sterilised in order to avoid having a child who could potentially be abused in a similar way. Another had lost custody of her children following an overdose, linked to the consequences of the sexual abuse. Fear of having children driven by societal discourses concerning the victim–perpetrator 'cycle of abuse' also featured in participants' accounts, despite the fact that the vast majority of victims and survivors do not go on to perpetrate sexual offences (see Fisher et al., 2017).

7.1.3 Education and employment

Quantitative information
Of the participants sexually abused in a religious context, 34 per cent reported an impact on their education or employment compared to 46 per cent of participants abused in other contexts. Participants who were abused in a religious context sometimes reported being unhappy at school or having academic difficulties (12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). In comparison, those abused in other contexts reported being unhappy at school or having academic difficulties slightly more frequently (18 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

Several participants described the difficulties they faced in educational attainment and employment prospects. Some recalled struggling at school or further education and not being able to apply themselves to both general education and religious teaching classes. Longer term, some participants described how they had struggled to hold down a full-time job due to the mental health issues they were dealing with as a result of the abuse. A lack of financial stability – which also impacted on housing arrangements – was reported and some expressed regret at not having been able to reach their full potential:

> " *Work has always been an issue for me. I've always worked, but I do struggle with full-time work and I struggle with keeping work. I tend to have jobs for a little while and then I need a break and it's difficult.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> " *And I suspect I probably would have had a decent career and some status and not be living in one room in a bedsit flat [that's owned by the council] thinking, 'Oh my god, am I going to lose my benefits next week?'*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

7.1.4 Re-victimisation

Quantitative information

Of the participants who shared that they were sexually abused in a religious context, 70 per cent reported one episode of abuse and 30 per cent reported experiencing multiple episodes of abuse involving different, unconnected perpetrators. The other episodes of abuse may have occurred prior to, concurrently with, or subsequent to, the abuse in a religious context. The findings indicate that nearly a third of these participants experienced re-victimisation at some point.

Qualitative information

Participants described being subject to further victimisation following their experiences of child sexual abuse in religious contexts. For example, one participant spoke of being sexually abused by another child. Participants also spoke about being continually re-victimised, in a psychological and emotional sense, by the religious institutions and communities themselves given their perpetual responses of deflection, denial and disbelief. For some, the experience of this was as bad – if not worse – than the abuse itself. Other forms of institutional re-victimisation included participants feeling penalised in compensation assessments because the abuse appeared to have had relatively little impact on their lives.

Participants spoke extensively about the impacts they had experienced throughout their lives as a result of their experiences of sexual abuse in religious contexts. These were similar to the impacts identified in *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment* (Fisher et al., 2017) and among others who have experienced abuse in religious institutions as children (Dreßing et al., 2018; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017b, 2017c). These reports also identified loss of religious faith and trust in religious representatives as a key impact (Dreßing et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) and described how the spiritual consequences for victims and survivors were compounded when institutions minimised or denied the abuse or required them to forgive the perpetrators.

7.2   Life journey narratives

So far this chapter has presented details of the range of impacts child sexual abuse perpetrated in religious contexts has had on the participants' lives. However, as described in _The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment,_ some individuals may demonstrate resilience and recovery after exposure to a potentially traumatic event (Fisher et al., 2017). In their accounts Truth Project participants demonstrated varying levels of resilience and recovery (recovery experiences are described in more detail in Chapter 8). Some articulated that while the sexual abuse had adverse consequences for their lives, they had also been able to achieve some degree of success and happiness in adulthood, while others said that the experience had ruined their lives.

> _Considering what has happened, I think I've done pretty well ... [I] prioritise looking after myself, so that's the main thing ... there was a while where I was tough on myself, particularly with my mental health, and really, now I've come to realise what I've been through, to come out the other side. It's like testament to how strong I am mentally and having to do these things, it was really tough ... it's taken such a long time. But I think that's normal._
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The impacts and ongoing consequences of child sexual abuse were relayed in the life journey narratives shared by participants. 'Life journeys' are a description of the person's experience in an institution(s) as a child and the subsequent impacts and consequences they attribute to their childhood experience of sexual abuse throughout their lives. To summarise the experiences of the participants in this study we have used the five life journey typologies developed by the Australian Royal Commission (see Katz et al., 2017).

These five life journey narratives are:

- _a life dominated by the abuse experience_ where victims and survivors' life journeys were characterised by persistent and pervasive difficulties throughout their childhood and adult life;

- _a life where victims and survivors had experienced substantial adverse impacts but tended to be optimistic that their situation would improve_;

- _a mixed life journey_ where victims and survivors functioned well in some aspects of their lives while simultaneously experiencing significant difficulty in other areas;

- _a life journey that vacillated between periods of wellbeing and periods of difficulty and/or distress_; and

- _a life journey with predominantly more positive life outcomes_ where victims and survivors acknowledged the abuse and its effects but had found ways to live with the trauma of child sexual abuse.

One participant in the qualitative cohort described their life as being dominated by their experiences of sexual abuse. Four participants had experienced substantial adverse impacts but were optimistic that their situation would improve. The accounts of two participants described a mixed life journey where they functioned well in some aspects of their lives but simultaneously experienced significant difficulty in other areas. One participant described a life journey that vacillated between periods of wellbeing and periods of difficulty and/or distress, and two participants described a life journey with predominantly more positive life outcomes where victims and survivors acknowledged the abuse and its effects but had found ways to live with the trauma of child sexual abuse. The accounts of two participants contained insufficient detail for us to identify which, if any, of the life journey categories would be appropriate.

Chapter 8
Experiences of recovery and support

This chapter relays the ways participants have found of coping with their experiences of child sexual abuse. It also describes their experiences of formal and informal support in helping them deal with the consequences and impacts of child sexual abuse in religious contexts. The content of this chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- **What has helped or hindered victims and survivors' recovery from child sexual abuse that occurred in a religious context?**

8.1 Experiences of recovery

8.1.1 Coping mechanisms and aids to recovery

Qualitative information
Across the qualitative sample, six coping mechanisms emerged that participants had used or were using as a way of trying to manage their experience of child sexual abuse and its impacts:

'Just carrying on'
One of the most common themes in participants' accounts was the notion of 'just carrying on'. Some participants did not think they were necessarily coping but rather were simply 'muddling through' and trying to find a way to live with it.

Suppression
Participants described suppressing the memory of the abuse and trying to block it out of their minds as a way of managing:

> *I can't remember that much, and I don't want to remember it, so I'm not going to …*
> *As I say, I'm happy with that.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

The use of alcohol as an aid to suppressing memories and impacts was also mentioned.

Speaking out
Although difficult, speaking out about the abuse had been helpful longer term for some participants. Verbalising what happened to them to police, to other victims and survivors, to someone they trusted, and to the Truth Project itself, had enabled them to better understand and cope with their experiences. The following participant describes this experience, explaining how challenging it was in the period afterwards:

> *I think with the police, recently, for the first time having to vocalise it and actually explain what happened, it almost exorcised it, like it got out. But then at the same time, I was ill for quite a few months afterwards.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Belief in the greater good and giving something back
Helping others was another coping mechanism shared by participants. Some had actively chosen to 'give something back' and adopt a positive belief system that 'good trumps evil'. For example, one participant had found some solace in her job helping vulnerable children cope with their own negative experiences, another had become a restorative justice practitioner.

> *I'm a restorative justice practitioner. I've been doing it for about 18 months. I did it on the back of the successful court case because the police put so much time into getting the result I wanted. I thought well maybe I can pay back a bit, yeah?*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Similarly, another participant was using poor treatment by authorities as motivation for instigating change which in turn was helping her to cope.

Therapy and support
Accessing therapy and counselling and having support networks were also important. Participants described how having someone explain the impacts they were experiencing had helped them to better deal with things and regain some control. Having time to reflect while in a residential health retreat or having access to mental health support at work were also mentioned as positive factors for coping and recovery, as was meeting or having a supportive partner, as the following participant explains:

> *... I do openly say that if I hadn't gone through therapy I wouldn't be with [name], who is my husband. Because it just – I think it made me – I think it gave me an understanding of probably what the impact of what had happened to me as a child was having to me in my adult life. Now, as I continue through my adult life, I see that more and more.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Validation and justice
Having the abuse validated by authorities such as the police, perpetrators admitting and taking responsibility for the abuse, and opportunities for restorative justice were also mentioned in the context of aids to recovery.

8.1.2 Hindrances to recovery

Qualitative information
Participants in our qualitative sample described three key factors which have hindered their recovery:

Religious figures as perpetrators in itself
Some participants believed that the perpetrator being a religious figure (ie rather than a lay-person) made their recovery more difficult. Being abused in this way by someone deemed a representative of a religious deity was particularly distressing because of the associated loss of religious faith and community. Perpetrators 'getting away with it' and continuing to be respected and revered by others while they as victims were ostracised or discredited was a notable hindrance to recovery which surfaced in participants' accounts:

> *That hurts, really, to think not only did he get away with it, he probably led a charmed life. Because priests are honoured within their local community.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

> *My mother had complained about my abuser's behaviour back in 2006 … the elders in the congregation they seemed to have found the entire incident funny … He [the abuser] was even made a ministerial servant which was very concerning as he had to help the elders with certain matters within the congregation.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Onus placed on children

The failure of other adults and authorities to identify the abuse and offer more helpful responses to it hindered participants' recovery. Participants described how it would have been more helpful to their recovery if the adults in their lives had offered to listen when they were children, asked the right questions and explained that what they were experiencing was wrong.

Professional responses and difficulty accessing formal support

Participants spoke about inappropriate and unhelpful responses of professionals such as GPs and teachers as well as difficulties accessing formal support as being hindrances to their recovery, illustrated by the following comment:

> *It feels like the system broke down in my case. It feels like … when I did try to speak to teachers, I didn't have the language, and it was easier to not get involved.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

Some participants reported having never been offered counselling and finding it impossible to find a therapist who was available and affordable.

8.2   Experiences of support

8.2.1   Support from religious institution

The overarching sentiment expressed by these participants was that the institution failed to provide them with any degree of support – as adults or children. Participants talked about a continual failure of the religious institution to acknowledge that the sexual abuse had taken place or that the rhetoric used by religious officials in the public domain did not match their experience of support.

In cases where the sexual abuse and its impacts had been recognised by the religious institution, participants still felt unsupported. One participant explained that *"I approached a number of [religious leaders] at the time, who promised us initially support, and that support was withdrawn"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Others talked about instances where the religious institution informally recognised the abuse but avoided situations where they would be forced to formally take action.

> **"** *I wrote to the bishop ... I asked to see him to talk about [the sexual abuse]. He wrote back saying he wouldn't see me ... So I wrote back to him and said, 'If I promise not to sue you, will you see me?' He wrote back saying, 'We'll give you a date'.*
>
> Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context

8.2.2   Informal support

Only a few participants talked about receiving informal support from adults when they were children and this was from adults outside the family in both cases.

As adults, most participants in this group received some degree of informal support after disclosing their experience of sexual abuse, most provided by family members. In some cases, familial support was mixed. One participant explained that despite receiving his mother's unbridled support, she was *"quite adamant ... in almost a protecting way, she doesn't want my father or my siblings or others in the family to know"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Another explained that she had always believed that her parents were unsupportive of her but, as an adult, she found out they had actually confronted the perpetrator when she first disclosed the abuse as a child. Outside of the family, one participant, who had written a book about the abuse she experienced, received informal support from her readers and social media followers.

8.2.3 Formal support

None of the participants were in a position to actively seek support from formal institutions as children.

As adults, victims and survivors accessed a wide variety of support services, most commonly starting with their GP. However, as a result many were placed on lengthy waiting lists that promised to deliver generic mental health services. A number of participants described having to return to their GP multiple times before they were taken seriously or reached crisis point.

Most participants accessed support through counselling; however, experiences were mixed. Many were positive and grateful for the opportunity. Some talked of being sectioned under mental health law or receiving mental health diagnoses, both of which were described as the start of participants' recoveries. One participant claimed *"When I saw the psychiatrist, probably Dr [name] saved my life. He was just the kind of person I needed"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context].

Another group of participants shared negative experiences of counselling, generally connected with the nature and manner of the individual counsellor. One participant shared that her therapist was a *"very, very bizarre woman. Very dangerous woman ... So it was a complete waste of her time and mine, and actually did a lot of harm to me"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. A small group of participants described not being listened to.

A handful of participants found support from charities, most commonly the Samaritans, and talked highly of the support they received. One individual, who accessed a rape crisis charity, explained that being *"given a safe place to just go and work it all out, and just people that could explain, you know, that was huge ... I can deal with it now ... I feel like I'm in control again"* [Truth Project participant sexually abused in a religious context]. Positive support experiences were also recounted from a local victim and survivor organisation and a local authority family support worker.

Irrespective of the type of support that victims and survivors had sought, there was a general sense that they had been forced to constantly fight and overcome deeply-rooted systemic issues in order to be taken seriously.

Participants talked about the many coping mechanisms and aids to recovery they had relied upon as a result of the sexual abuse they had experienced in religious contexts. These were similar to the coping mechanisms and aids to recovery documented in *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment* (Fisher et al., 2017). Moreover, victims and survivors discussed at length receiving inadequate support from religious institutions following their experience of abuse – an experience which was also highlighted by studies in Australia and Germany (Dreßing et al., 2018; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017c).

Chapter 9

Summary of key findings from the research and victims and survivors' suggestions for change

This chapter provides a summary of the key research findings and themes identified in the report and relevant to the research sub-questions set out in Chapter 1. It reports the potentially unique characteristics identified in these cases of child sexual abuse in religious contexts and suggests how these may differ from abuse in other institutions and circumstances. The chapter concludes by detailing the changes participants think are necessary to prevent sexual abuse in religious institutions for children in future and to improve responses to, and support for, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. In doing so it addresses the research sub-question:

- **What changes do victims and survivors suggest to improve child protection and prevent child sexual abuse in the future?**

9.1   Summary of key findings from the research

In addressing the research questions this report has detailed experiences of child sexual abuse in religious contexts, the institutional failures in relation to this abuse and the impacts upon victims and survivors. The research findings indicate particular features and characteristics of abuse in these institutions in the past. Although this is the first in a published series of thematic research reports analysing information shared with the Truth Project, ongoing analysis and review of wider Truth Project data suggests that sexual abuse in religious contexts may be different to that experienced in other institutions and circumstances in relation to the following:

- There was a higher proportion of male participants who reported being sexually abused in a religious context, compared to participants abused in other contexts. The nature of the abuse for participants abused in religious contexts typically involved fondling or other forms of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact, and participants less frequently reported penetrative abuse than participants abused in other contexts. In addition, the age of participants when they first experienced sexual abuse in a religious context was slightly older than people abused in a non-religious context.

- Participants considered that the power, authority and reverence bestowed upon religious institutions and the individuals working within them meant perpetrators were seen as having a higher moral authority and their conduct was seen as unquestionable. They were easily able to spend time alone with victims by virtue of the privilege parents and carers thought it was for their children to be asked. Participants perceived that families, congregations, communities and other professionals could not contemplate that religious individuals could sexually abuse or cause any harm and therefore they were able to act with relative impunity.

- A smaller proportion of participants sexually abused in a religious context reported the abuse at the time it was happening compared to those abused in other contexts. For those who did report the abuse when it was ongoing, nearly half described reporting it to someone in authority inside the institution. A large proportion of participants sexually abused in religious contexts disclosed the abuse after it had ended. The abuse was most often reported to the police or someone in authority in the institution. Overall, a greater proportion of participants abused in a religious context reported their experience of abuse to someone in authority inside the institution than participants who were abused in other contexts, both as a child and as an adult. This difference indicates the relative influence religious institutions have in comparison to other institutions. Those who disclosed the abuse after it ended less frequently reported the abuse to mental health or medical professionals, welfare or child protection officers and friends than those abused in other contexts.

- Participants' accounts revealed how the extent of influence and involvement the religious institutions had over their communities and the daily lives, culture and background of the victims and their families was more significant than typically seen in other institutions. This provided more opportunities for the abuse to occur and made it particularly difficult for victims to be able to tell anyone about what was happening. Religious conservatism evident in some of the communities also meant sex and sexual matters were never discussed and consequently children had very little understanding that the perpetrators' behaviour was abusive. Connected with this was the way in which perpetrators were able to use the children's spirituality and religion to manipulate them.

- Participants described how the protection of the reputation of the religious institution and individual perpetrators at all costs meant that they as victims were often disbelieved, discredited and not supported after disclosing their experience of sexual abuse both as children and as adults. In addition to the protection offered by religious leaders, congregations and community members also protected the institutional reputation and that of individual perpetrators in a more extensive way than seen in other types of institution. Participants were either aware at the time or found out later that perpetrators were often moved to other locations within the religious community and the concerns about them not passed on to those in the new location.

- In relation to the impacts following the abuse, participants sexually abused in a religious context often reported experiencing a loss of faith. Participants also spoke about the types of impacts on their sexual behaviour more frequently than those abused in other contexts, particularly experiencing avoidance or phobic reactions to sexual intimacy.

- The spiritual impact of the abuse upon victims and survivors was evident in the accounts of those sexually abused within religious contexts. This can have a particularly damaging impact on victims and survivors, especially where their religion provided the foundation to their morality, beliefs, social relationships and the way they lived their daily lives. The extent of the breach of trust involved in child sexual abuse in religious contexts reached beyond the victim and survivor questioning the individual perpetrators and institutions involved and challenged their religious and spiritual beliefs in a way not generally evident in abuse that occurred in other institutions and circumstances.

The research findings in this report reflect many similarities to those detailed in the final report of the Australian Royal Commission relating to experiences of sexual abuse in religious institutions and in previous research into abuse in the Anglican and Catholic Churches (Dreßing et al., 2018; IICSA Research Team, 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

Consistent with the information we have presented here, these reports found that a central factor in the child sexual abuse in religious institutions was the notion of the high regard and trust placed in religious institutions and those associated with them (often referred to as 'clericalism' within the Catholic Church) (Dreßing et al., 2018; IICSA Research Team, 2017; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). This status has both enabled abuse in religious institutions and hindered appropriate responses to it.

Given this is the first of our published thematic reports of experiences shared with the Truth Project it is not possible at this stage to fully compare those sexually abused in religious contexts with those abused in other institutions and circumstances. The full comparison across different institution types and circumstances will be presented in a later Truth Project research report.

9.2 Victims and survivors' suggestions for change

Participants experienced sexual abuse in religious contexts between the 1940s and 2010s, much of it covering a period where understanding of and attitudes towards child sexual abuse were different to how they are today.

The quantitative analysis showed that the most common suggestion for change made by participants sexually abused in religious contexts was to increase community and parental knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse (36 per cent). Participants also frequently spoke about the need for children to have someone to report the abuse to (32 per cent). A summary of suggestions for change can be found in Appendix A.

Participants in the qualitative sample described many difficulties throughout their lives since the time of the sexual abuse and made explicit suggestions about what they think needed to change to improve child protection and prevent child sexual abuse in religious institutions in future. They also shared their views on how victims and survivors of abuse could be better supported. Their suggestions were categorised according to the four thematic areas outlined by the Chair in the *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (Jay et al., 2018), *structural*; *financial*; *cultural*; *professional and political,* and are presented in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1   Suggestions for change made by Truth Project participants (qualitative sample) sexually abused in religious contexts

Structural
Participants said:
There needs to be institutional and societal structural-level changes to collectively prevent abuse in religious institutions.
All children need to have access to someone safe who they can disclose abuse or concerns to.
Resources and helplines should be made known and available to those inside all religious communities.
Training, education and support around child abuse should be delivered by external and specially approved agencies, particularly for closed or minority religious communities.
There needs to be support and protection provided for those who come forward and report abuse (not just for abuse but for the potential harassment or exclusion they might face in religious communities).
There needs to be funding and research undertaken examining perpetrator behaviour and motivations.
The Inquiry should make institutions who have been reported to the Truth Project as having failed aware that concerns have been raised about them.

Financial
Participants said:
Funding needs to be available for all victims and survivors to be able to access appropriate support and counselling services.
Date limitations on the ability to claim compensation should be removed.
Social services and support agencies need to receive more funding.
Funding allocated for addressing child protection and support services should be carefully monitored to ensure it is being appropriately spent on required activities.

Cultural

Participants said:

The secrecy which comes with the sanctity of the church/religious community needs to be addressed.

The stigma and blame on victims need to be lifted and the belittling of their experiences prevented.

Adults in all capacities need to be more responsible in reporting and questioning concerns.

Barriers between isolated, closed communities and wider society need to be broken down.

Assumptions about the morality of all religious leaders need to be addressed.

There needs to be better education around child sexual abuse, particularly in more closed religious communities.

Education for adults needs to be improved to enable the identification of potential signs of abuse and behavioural changes in children.

Children in religious communities and institutions need to understand what abusive behaviour is and who they can go to for help.

Professional and political

Participants said:

Victims and survivors need to be at the centre of all dealings relating to the abuse, including children and young people.

Religious leaders must come together to instigate and encourage required change.

Religious institutions need to take responsibility for abuse that has occurred and apologise to victims and survivors for their failings.

All religious institutions and communities must fully implement child protection policies and procedures (including thorough background checks).

There needs to be better training for religious leaders on child abuse and safeguarding.

Transparency within and between religious institutions needs to be improved (particularly around individuals of concern and moving perpetrators of abuse elsewhere).

There needs to be more visible and public reprimanding of perpetrators by the religious institutions in which they have abused.

Child protection officers in religious institutions should not be part of the religious community they are working in.

Professionals should not disclose their own religious beliefs or affiliations when dealing with reports of abuse.

External professionals need training on working with minority communities; they need to be better able to balance the need for cultural respect with required regulation and oversight of child safeguarding.

Training for police in responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse should be improved.

There needs to be greater freedom among professionals to raise concerns about anything they notice without fear of backlash.

Appendices

Appendix A
Quantitative data tables

Please note that due to the nature of Truth Project data collection, we do not always have information for every individual. This is reflected in the quantitative data tables, which may not always be fully populated. Please also note that some percentages may not total or may exceed 100 per cent due to rounding or participants reporting on more than one variable shown in a table.

Chapter 3   Backgrounds of children sexually abused in religious contexts

Sex	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Male	111	61%	503	34%
Female	69	38%	985	66%
Other	1	1%	6	<1%
Total	181		1494	
Unknown	2		20	
Total (including unknown)	**183**		**1514**	

Disability or long-term illness/condition*	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Yes	90	49%	788	52%
No	93	51%	726	48%
Total	**183**		**1514**	

* This is defined as a condition that limits a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Age at Truth Project session (age bands)*	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
18–19	0	0%	9	1%
20–29	4	2%	106	8%
30–39	14	9%	195	15%
40–49	37	23%	328	25%
50–59	52	32%	412	31%
60–69	37	23%	199	15%
70–79	16	10%	75	6%
80 or older	1	1%	7	1%
Total	161		1331	
Unknown	22		183	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

* All information in this report pertains to adult participants in the Truth Project only.

Decade abuse commenced	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
1930s (or earlier)	0	0%	3	0%
1940s	3	2%	18	1%
1950s	20	12%	116	9%
1960s	46	28%	263	19%
1970s	51	31%	433	32%
1980s	31	19%	288	21%
1990s	11	7%	158	12%
2000s	3	2%	71	5%
2010s	1	1%	4	<1%
Total	166		1354	
Unknown	17		160	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Age abuse commenced	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
0–3 years old	12	7%	169	12%
4–7 years old	36	20%	464	32%
8–11 years old	73	41%	480	33%
12–15 years old	49	28%	293	20%
16–17 years old	6	3%	38	3%
Total	176		1444	
Unknown	7		70	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Ethnicity	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
White	123	93%	991	92%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	6	5%	36	3%
Asian/Asian British	3	2%	26	2%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0	0%	14	1%
Other ethnic group	0	0%	8	1%
Total	132		1075	
Unknown	51		439	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Sexual orientation	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Heterosexual/straight	94	85%	854	86%
Gay man	12	11%	35	4%
Gay woman/lesbian	3	3%	51	5%
Bisexual	2	2%	48	5%
Other	0	0%	5	1%
Total	111		993	
Unknown	72		521	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Type of session	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Private session in person	157	86%	1262	83%
Experience shared in writing	20	11%	204	13%
Private session via telephone	4	2%	48	3%
Private session in person and experience shared in writing	1	1%	0	0%
Private session in person and via telephone	1	1%	0	0%
Total	183		1514	

Victim and survivor's reason for attending	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Wanted change to prevent abuse happening to someone else	108	59%	836	55%
Wanted to tell someone in authority	41	22%	306	20%
Wanted some resolution	38	21%	296	20%
Reason other	28	15%	217	14%
Wanted to be believed	23	13%	211	14%
No reason given	29	16%	278	18%
Total	183		1514	

Chapter 4   Context and nature of the child sexual abuse

Relationship of perpetrator to victim and survivor	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Clergy	72	54%	0	0%
Church-related staff	36	27%	0	0%
Relationship other	15	11%	65	4%
Family member	11	8%	626	41%
Teaching or educational staff	9	7%	289	19%
Youth/activity/sports worker	3	2%	37	2%
Older child or other child/young person	3	2%	183	12%
Residential care worker	2	2%	84	6%
Carer (foster, pre-school, after school)	1	1%	57	4%
Other professional	0	0%	119	8%
Ancillary staff	0	0%	33	2%
Total	133		1514	

Institution where the abuse took place	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Religious organisation	102	67%	0	0%
School (all types)	25	16%	321	21%
Welfare institution	9	6%	137	9%
Club (recreational, scouts/guides, sports)	5	3%	59	4%
Medical (hospital, GP, dentist)	2	1%	50	3%
Other institution	2	1%	55	4%
Detention (custody, immigration)	1	1%	25	2%
Care (foster, pre-school, after school)	0	0%	69	5%
Total	153		1514	

Denomination of religious organisation where sexual abuse took place		
Church of England	37	28%
Catholic	33	25%
Jehovah's Witnesses	15	11%
Christian (unspecified)	12	9%
Baptist	5	4%
Methodist	4	3%
Islam	3	2%
Mormon	1	1%
Salvation Army	1	1%
United Reform Church	1	1%
Judaism	1	1%
Unknown	21	16%
Total	133	

Type of sexual abuse grouped	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Fondling	114	62%	823	54%
Behaviour not involving penetration	63	34%	500	33%
Behaviour involving penetration	58	32%	760	50%
Grooming for the purposes of sexual contact	37	20%	314	21%
Violations of privacy	23	13%	233	15%
Exposing children to adult sexuality	19	10%	223	15%
Other sexual behaviour	8	4%	24	2%
Exploitation	5	3%	100	7%
Total	183		1514	

Other forms of abuse	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Mentioned any other form of abuse	88	48%	800	53%
Particular types of abuse				
Psychological abuse	44	24%	437	29%
Physical abuse	40	22%	495	33%
Emotional abuse/entrapment	32	17%	309	20%
Bullying	17	9%	178	12%
Witnessing the abuse of others/indirect victimisation	13	7%	181	12%
Neglect	10	5%	137	9%
Child labour	1	1%	25	2%
Total	183		1514	

Chapter 5   Institutional context and knowledge of the child sexual abuse

Victim knew of someone else being abused	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Yes	88	48%	531	35%
Total	183		1514	

Did the victim and survivor tell anyone about the abuse at the time the abuse was happening?	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Yes – all experiences of abuse were reported	49	30%	523	39%
No – all experiences of abuse went unreported	110	68%	714	54%
Some episodes were reported, some were not	3	2%	95	7%
Total	162		1332	
Unknown	21		182	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Who abuse was reported to at the time (of those who reported abuse)	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Person in authority inside institution	25	48%	181	29%
Parent	23	44%	254	41%
Police	11	21%	227	37%
Welfare/child protection officer	7	13%	121	20%
Other person	5	10%	92	15%
Child friend	4	8%	67	11%
Person providing mental health service (incl. counsellor, psychologist)	3	6%	16	3%
Other relative	3	6%	27	4%
Medical personnel (eg doctor, nurse)	2	4%	28	5%
Adult friend	1	2%	5	1%
Partner (incl. boyfriend/girlfriend)	0	0%	4	1%
Sibling	0	0%	28	5%
Total	52		618	

Why abuse was not reported at the time, if it was not reported	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Shame, embarrassment	42	37%	172	21%
Didn't have the language to explain what was happening	23	20%	136	17%
Didn't know the behaviour was not ok	23	20%	173	21%
Fear of not being believed	22	19%	147	18%
Felt guilty	20	18%	80	10%
Didn't want to hurt their family	18	16%	129	16%
Not reported for other reason	17	15%	151	19%
Did not want anyone else to know	15	13%	88	11%
Fear of retribution by perpetrator	11	10%	159	20%
Just wanted to forget	11	10%	29	4%
Fear of retribution by institution	10	9%	39	5%
Believed they were special (eg given special privileges)	9	8%	58	7%
Believed the perpetrator loved him/her	7	6%	46	6%
Thought they would get in trouble	6	5%	82	10%
Perpetrator threatened victim/family/other significant people	4	4%	67	8%
Regarded as private	3	3%	23	3%
Fear of retribution against the perpetrator	3	3%	25	3%
Total	113		809	

Did the victim and survivor tell anyone/report the abuse after the abuse ended?	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Yes – all experiences of abuse were reported	139	85%	1070	82%
No – all experiences of abuse went unreported	24	15%	192	15%
Some episodes were reported, some were not	0	0%	39	3%
Total	163		1301	
Unknown	20		213	
Total (including unknown)	183		1514	

Who abuse was reported to after it had ended (if abuse was reported)	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Police	84	60%	596	54%
Person in authority inside institution	45	32%	76	7%
Parent	14	10%	171	15%
Told other person	13	9%	77	7%
Person providing mental health service (incl. counsellor, psychologist)	11	8%	209	19%
Partner (incl. boyfriend/girlfriend)	11	8%	108	10%
Adult friend	5	4%	62	6%
Other relative	5	4%	70	6%
Medical personnel (eg doctor, nurse)	3	2%	69	6%
Sibling	3	2%	58	5%
Welfare/child protection officer	2	1%	68	6%
Child friend	0	0%	12	1%
Total	139		1109	

Chapter 7   Impacts of the child sexual abuse

Impacts (grouped)	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Mental health	149	81%	1304	86%
Relationships	90	49%	767	51%
Sexual behaviour	67	37%	437	29%
School/employment	63	34%	697	46%
Direct consequence	20	11%	236	16%
Physical health	14	8%	97	6%
Criminal behaviour	12	7%	156	10%
Total	183		1514	

Detailed impacts	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Difficulties with trust and intimacy	64	35%	512	34%
Anxiety	60	33%	547	36%
Depression	59	32%	595	39%
Lack of trust in authority	50	27%	355	23%
Thoughts of suicide	49	27%	434	29%
Feeling of guilt	47	26%	299	20%
Nightmares	37	20%	252	17%
Attempted suicide	35	19%	309	20%
Alcohol abuse	35	19%	271	18%
Avoidance of or phobic reactions to sexual intimacy	34	19%	175	12%
Loss of religious faith	33	18%	28	2%
Low self-esteem	31	17%	362	24%
Other behavioural and mental health functioning	31	17%	213	14%
Eating and sleeping difficulties	26	14%	229	15%
Self-harming	25	14%	327	22%
Post-traumatic stress disorder	25	14%	298	20%
Aggression	25	14%	217	14%
Marital problems	23	13%	186	12%
Panic attacks	22	12%	170	11%
Unhappy at school	22	12%	269	18%
Discomfort/lack of confidence with parenting	21	11%	158	10%
Academic difficulties	21	11%	264	17%
Other impact on relationship	19	10%	175	12%
Physical Injury	16	9%	156	10%
Running away	16	9%	172	11%
Confusion about sexual identity	15	8%	84	6%
Feeling helpless	15	8%	165	11%
Illicit drug use	15	8%	204	13%
Other impact on sexual behaviour	14	8%	75	5%
Other physical health	13	7%	91	6%

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Detailed impacts	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Under employment/difficulty in maintaining work	13	7%	123	8%
Other education/economic impact	13	7%	119	8%
Sexually risky behaviour/unprotected sex	10	5%	76	5%
Left school early	10	5%	143	9%
Multiple partners	9	5%	142	9%
Minor offences	9	5%	101	7%
Difficulty in arousal	8	4%	45	3%
Truancy	7	4%	131	9%
Unable to work	7	4%	93	6%
Overuse of prescription medication	6	3%	29	2%
Other financial difficulties	6	3%	49	3%
Violent offences	6	3%	33	2%
Pregnancy	5	3%	72	5%
Other direct consequence	5	3%	21	1%
Phobias	5	3%	53	4%
Self-hatred	4	2%	87	6%
Unemployment	4	2%	55	4%
Exchange sex for money	3	2%	44	3%
Hypertension	2	1%	9	1%
Other involvement in crime as an offender	2	1%	32	2%
Sexually transmitted disease	0	0%	26	2%
Gambling	0	0%	8	1%
Sexual offences	0	0%	13	1%
Total	183		1514	

Suggestions for change	Religious contexts		Other contexts	
Other* changes	68	37%	458	30%
Increase community's/parents'/children's knowledge/ awareness about child sexual abuse/ child sexual exploitation	65	36%	610	40%
Someone to report the abuse to	59	32%	505	33%
Increased supervision of children	51	28%	288	19%
Systems to identify children who are at risk/ experiencing abuse at an early stage	49	27%	512	34%
Increased access to therapy/appropriate support in a timely fashion	48	26%	402	27%
Child safety education programmes	41	22%	405	27%
Believing children who report	40	22%	475	31%
Alternative approaches to court processes	18	10%	145	10%
No time limit on bringing legal proceedings	9	5%	41	3%
Changes to the rules of evidence	8	4%	75	5%
Not sure	4	2%	14	1%
Sentencing reform	3	2%	50	3%
Total	183		1514	

* This refers to the range of other changes victims and survivors suggested that are not included in the specific categories below.

Appendix B
Glossary

Behaviour involving penetration	This relates to vaginal, anal or digital penetration, cunnilingus and fellatio.
Behaviour not involving penetration	This relates to prolonged kissing, cuddling, french kissing and excessive touching.
Child	A person under the age of 18.
Child physical abuse	Physical abuse of children involves someone deliberately hurting a child, causing injuries such as bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts. Children may suffer violence such as being hit, kicked, poisoned, burned, slapped, having objects thrown at them or intentionally being made unwell.
Child protection	Activity that is undertaken to protect children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.
Child sexual abuse	Sexual abuse of children involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact and non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet. Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation.
Child sexual exploitation	Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain.
Church-related staff	Any staff who are involved in a religious institution but not ordained for religious duties, including volunteers and scripture teachers.
Clergy	The collective term for all ordained individuals in a number of religions.
Criminal justice system	The system which investigates, prosecutes, sentences and monitors individuals who are suspected or convicted of committing a criminal offence. This also encompasses institutions responsible for imprisonment, probation and sentences served in the community.

Diocese	Geographical area by which the Church of England and the Catholic Church are divided for religious, administrative and pastoral activities. A bishop is typically responsible for a diocese in both the Church of England and the Catholic Church.
Direct consequence of abuse	This is made up of four categories: Pregnancy; Physical injury; Sexually transmitted diseases; Other.
Elder	A person who holds a position of authority and responsibility in a Jehovah's Witness community and is typically responsible for taking the lead in the congregation.
Episodes of child sexual abuse/exploitation	An 'episode' relates to sexual abuse involving a particular perpetrator(s) or institution(s). It may involve a single instance of sexual abuse or relate to more than one instance which takes place over a period of time. We have defined an 'episode' of abuse as the following: ● an instance or multiple instances of sexual abuse committed by a single perpetrator ● a single instance of sexual abuse committed by multiple perpetrators ● multiple instances of sexual abuse committed by multiple perpetrators but only where there is collusion between the perpetrators. An episode involving multiple perpetrators could include cases where there is collusion between perpetrators, such as gang rape, paedophile rings or child sexual exploitation. An episode could also involve more than one institution, such as abuse perpetrated by one person but in several settings.
Exploitation – online	This relates to exploitation via images, voice, text, gaming, for example. See also: child sexual exploitation.
Exploitation – physical world	This relates to instances of exploitation such as selling a child to perform sexual services; having a child perform in indecent images; exchanging or purchasing indecent images of children. See also: child sexual exploitation.
Exposing children to adult sexuality – online	This relates to exposing a child to adult sexuality by means of images, voice, text, gaming, for example.
Exposing children to adult sexuality – physical world	This relates to performing sexual acts in front of a child, exposing genitals to a child, child nudity for the sexual gratification of the adult, videotaping, or filming of a child with the intent to create sexual stimulation.
Fondling	This relates to touching, masturbating or kissing a child's genitals and/or making a child fondle an adult's genitals.
Grooming for child sexual abuse	Building a relationship with a child in order to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.
Imam	A religious leader in a Muslim community who may be involved in various activities, including leading congregational prayer and teaching.

Impact	A marked effect or influence on someone or something.
	Information on impacts presented in this report aligns with categorisations used in the Truth Project.
	It is used in this report to describe what victims and survivors themselves reported about the effects of the abuse they experienced.
Impact of criminal behaviour	This is made up of four categories: Sexual offences; Violent offences; Minor offences; Other.
Institution	Means the same as 'organisation'. That is, a group of people who work together in an organised way for a particular shared purpose. For example, a business, a government department, a school or a church.
Institutional sexual abuse	Sexual abuse perpetrated by someone within a particular setting or service. For example, a teacher in a school or a priest within a church.
	See also: institution.
Law enforcement agencies	Statutory agencies with responsibility for policing and intelligence, including police forces, the intelligence services and the National Crime Agency.
Lay people	Those working within or on behalf of the church, such as employees in Catholic institutions or volunteers who have not been ordained and are not members of a religious institute.
Negative impact on mental health	This is made up of 24 sub-categories: Low self-esteem; Anxiety; Panic attacks; Self-harming; Thoughts of suicide; Attempted suicide; Died by suicide; Feeling helpless; Running away; Gambling; Lack of trust in authority; Loss of religious faith; Phobias; Depression; Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); Feeling of guilt; Self-hatred; Aggression; Eating and sleeping difficulties; Nightmares (including flashbacks); Over-use of prescription medication; Illicit drug use; Alcohol abuse; Other.
Negative impact on physical health	This is made up of two categories: Hypertension (high blood pressure); Other.
Negative impact on relationships	This is made up of four sub-categories: Difficulties with trust and intimacy; Discomfort/lack of confidence with parenting; Marital problems; Other.
Negative impact on school/employment	This is made up of nine sub-categories: Left school early; Unhappy at school; Truancy; Academic difficulties – concentration/learning; Unemployment; Unable to work; Under-employment/difficulty in maintaining work; Other financial difficulties; Other.
Negative impact on sexual behaviour	This is made up of seven sub-categories: Exchange sex for money; Multiple partners; Sexually risky behaviour/unprotected sex; Confusion about sexual identity; Difficulty in arousal; Avoidance of/or phobic reactions to sexual intimacy; Other.
Parish	The smallest geographical unit by which the Church of England or Catholic Church are organised. It is often overseen by a parish priest and a number of parishes typically make up a diocese.

Prevalence of child sexual abuse	The proportion of a population who have experienced child sexual abuse.
Priest (Catholic)	A man who has been ordained into the priesthood by a bishop. Priests typically preach, celebrate mass and fulfil a pastoral role in their community.
Priest (Church of England)	An ordained person who preaches, celebrates the sacraments and provides pastoral care. They may be allocated to a particular parish.
Rapid evidence assessment (REA)	A research methodology used in the identification, quality assessment and synthesis of existing literature on a particular topic. More structured and rigorous than a standard literature review, it is not as exhaustive as a systematic review.
Recovery	The act or process of returning to a positive, former or improved level of functioning following a traumatic experience that caused a decline in levels of functioning and wellbeing.
Religious	Members of a religious institute, for example religious priests and religious sisters or brothers.
Religious context	In this report, this term refers to instances of sexual abuse that: • took place in a religious institution or in a location affiliated with a religious institution; or • was perpetrated by a member of the clergy or an individual who carries out religious duties; or • was perpetrated by another child who displayed harmful sexual behaviour in the context of a religious institution. Please see section 1.2 of the report for additional detail. This definition was developed by the Inquiry's research team and is used for sample selection and for the purposes of comparison with other contexts in which abuse occurred.
Resilience	The ability to sustain adaptive levels of healthy functioning following a traumatic experience and/or the capacity to recover quickly from an adverse/traumatic experience.
Re-victimisation	Becoming a victim of violence, crime and abuse, having already been victimised previously.
Sacristy	A room in a church used to prepare for a service and where various items used in worship are kept.
Safeguarding	• Protecting children from maltreatment; • Preventing impairment of children's health or development; • Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and • Taking actions to enable all children to have the best life chances.
Statutory agencies	Institutions set up by law to carry out public activities.

Structural constraint	The various political, economic, social and cultural factors which can shape an individual's life and operate external to the individual, beyond their control.
Vicar	An ordained priest who is assigned to a particular parish in the Church of England.
Victims and survivors	Defined in this report as individuals who have been sexually abused as children.
Violation of privacy	This relates to situations such as forcing a child to undress and/or spying on a child in the bathroom or bedroom.

Sources: BBC (2013); Fisher et al. (2017); IICSA Research Team (2017); Jay et al. (2018); Church of England (n.d.); IICSA (n.d.); Islamic Association of Raleigh (n.d.); Jehovah's Witnesses (n.d.); Vatican (n.d.).

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