

Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts

**An analysis of Disclosure
and Barring Service
discretionary case files**

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**Julienne Zammit, Dr Sarah Senker, Dr Hannah Bows,
Holly Rodger, Dr Theresa Redmond and Dr Verena Brähler**

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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 research findings arising from the fieldwork do not constitute formal recommendations by the Inquiry's Chair and Panel and are separate from legal evidence obtained in investigations and hearings.

The report contains direct accounts and quotes from alleged perpetrators, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation, witnesses and professionals. Reading the report can have an emotional impact. There are some support organisations that it may be helpful to contact if you have been affected by any of the content in the report:

www.iicsa.org.uk/help-and-support-0.

The following correction was made to this version of the report on 29 April 2022:

- Page 49: details of prosecution under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 were added.

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') was set up as a statutory inquiry in March 2015. The Inquiry has been tasked with considering 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 to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse.

Despite increasing institutional safeguards over recent years, and growing research into child sexual abuse in institutions, there is still a lack of knowledge in relation to child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts. The aim of this study was to better understand the offending behaviours of perpetrators who sexually abused children across a broad range of contemporary institutional contexts in England and Wales ('contemporary' was defined in this study as 2017 onwards). The study also examined the circumstances and situational factors related to how child sexual abuse was perpetrated in a range of institutional contexts, and how institutions and professionals identified, reported and responded to risks of child sexual abuse. The study contributes to the wider evidence base concerned with tackling child sexual abuse and may assist policy makers and practitioners in better understanding institutional grooming, abuse of trust, and safeguarding in institutional contexts, thereby improving prevention of and responses to child sexual abuse.

Two broad research questions were addressed:

- 1 What is known about perpetrators of child sexual abuse, their offending strategies and the nature of child sexual abuse in a broad range of contemporary institutional contexts?
- 2 How do institutions and professionals identify, report and respond to risks and allegations of child sexual abuse?

Methodology, sample and ethics

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is a public body that "*makes considered decisions about whether somebody should be barred from engaging in regulated activity*" (Gov.UK, 2019). Examples of roles which could fall under regulated activity include teaching or providing health and personal care to vulnerable adults or children. This research is the first of its kind,¹ analysing contemporary records (2017–2020) from the Disclosure and Barring Service, involving both male and female individuals added to the Children's Barred List.

A qualitative case file analysis approach was taken, analysing a sample of 43 DBS case files out of the 544 cases in which an individual was added to the DBS Children's Barred List on **discretionary grounds** and on the grounds of sexual harm between September 2017 and June 2020. These 'discretionary referral cases' have been referred to the DBS by institutions (employers, or regulators for example) because there are, or have been, concerns about that individual's behaviour with children or vulnerable adults, which have led to them being removed from or leaving their position. These cases engage the discretionary decision-making powers of the DBS unless the behaviour results in a caution or conviction for a prescribed offence; such cases are reclassified as 'autobar' cases.

1 This study builds on another small-scale study which analysed DBS case files (Darling and Antonopoulos, 2013).

We refer to individuals described in DBS discretionary cases and who have been added to the Children's Barred List as 'alleged perpetrators' when describing events which took place before an individual was referred to the DBS and added to the Children's Barred List, and as 'barred individuals' when describing the sample, or when describing events which took place after an individual was added to the Children's Barred list.

The cases analysed were only those cases relevant to England and Wales jurisdictions and which pertained to the Children's Barred List. These cases involved alleged perpetrators working or volunteering within an institution at the point of referral, and where individuals were under the age of 18 at the time of the reported incidents of child sexual abuse. The sample covered a range of sectors, including education, voluntary and community, sports and leisure, foster care, social care, childcare, faith and healthcare sectors.

Over half of the barred individuals in the sample were between the ages of 19 and 34 years (24 cases) and male (32 cases). The majority of sexually abused children were under the age of 15 (37 cases) and female (51 cases).² Some of the cases analysed (16 cases) involved multiple children.

This project received ethical approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee in December 2019 to carry out case file analysis of DBS's discretionary referral cases and the project was subject to rigorous ethical scrutiny.

Seven key research findings

1. Alleged perpetrators across different types of institutional contexts used similar tactics and methods to sexually groom and sexually abuse children

Sexual grooming strategies were often methodical and gradual, and involved befriending children and their families. Case files illustrated that alleged perpetrators were often charismatic, competent individuals who were well liked and respected by colleagues. Their positive perceptions may have resulted in their offending behaviours being minimised or excused by those around them. We observed that alleged perpetrators:

- (a) denied the child sexual abuse occurred at all; or
- (b) admitted the contact had occurred but denied it was sexual abuse, using tactics such as victim blaming or describing the sexual abuse as a consensual 'relationship'; or
- (c) admitted the sexual abuse but minimised their responsibility, for example by claiming they had made 'mistakes' or 'poor judgements'; or
- (d) disputed they held 'positions of trust', indicating that, therefore, safeguarding policies did not apply to them and had not been breached.

2. Most child sexual abuse took place in physical locations away from the institution, or in private and unsupervised spaces where children were isolated by alleged perpetrators

Most child sexual abuse took place in physical locations away from institutional premises. Physical locations where sexual abuse occurred included cars, hotels or the child or adult's home. Where child sexual abuse took place within institutional premises, alleged perpetrators sought out private spaces in which to isolate children and remain undetected, such as bathrooms or disused classrooms. They also targeted children on social media platforms which afforded them constant access to children in unsupervised and unmonitored online spaces.

² Some cases involved more than one sexually abused child.

3. Sexual grooming and child sexual abuse frequently took place using technology or online and via social media

Technology and social media were frequently used to groom children and perpetrate child sexual abuse. The process of sexual grooming online mirrored the same gradual and systematic sexual grooming tactics that alleged perpetrators applied offline and in person. Instant messaging exchanges allowed them to develop a rapport with children and gain their trust. The nature of the child sexual abuse online sometimes escalated to the use of sexualised language, imagery or the use of live-streaming or video calls to perform sexual acts. Contact with children online or through text messaging offered opportunities to be in frequent – and in some cases almost constant – contact with children.

4. Institutional cultures allowed informal contact and over-familiarity between alleged perpetrators and children, and this enabled individuals to sexually abuse children without raising suspicions

Institutional cultures of over-familiarity and informal relationships between adults and children contributed to child sexual abuse. Informal interactions between adults and children were normalised and were therefore not considered 'unusual' or potentially harmful by institutions and professionals. A range of behaviours associated with informal institutional cultures were observed in the case files, including sharing cars, socialising outside of the institution, going to the pub or fast-food restaurants, and contacting and befriending children via social media or instant messaging. These behaviours and activities often formed part of the culture of institutions, particularly in sports or leisure clubs, societies, and voluntary and community sectors, as well as in schools and residential care homes. In almost all of the cases analysed in this research, alleged perpetrators had developed an informal social relationship with the child. These informal relationships provided opportunities to sexually groom and abuse children without raising suspicions.

5. Alleged perpetrators and institutions framed sexually abusive relationships as consensual and romantic relationships

Sexually abusive relationships between adults and children were conflated with consensual and romantic relationships. This had the effect of normalising and legitimising risk behaviours, and led to institutions not properly assessing risk of harm and handling concerns or allegations where abusive relationships were known to have formed between adults and children under their care. In some cases, children had been groomed to believe they were in consensual relationships with the alleged perpetrators, hindering children's ability to recognise and disclose incidents of child sexual abuse. In some cases, child sexual abuse was concealed due to the wider informal social relationships that commonly occurred.

6. There were numerous missed opportunities to safeguard children because concerns were not escalated, disclosures were not always believed and institutions and staff did not share, record and respond appropriately to low-level concerns

Institutions and professionals responded inappropriately to low-level disclosures. Disclosure pathways were often poorly established which may have made it difficult for children, peers or concerned adults (whether colleagues, parents or family members) to raise concerns. There were examples where information sharing had not occurred across and between institutions. In some cases, the totality of the alleged perpetrator's behaviour was missed and they went on to offend in other institutional contexts. Low-level concerns were often not fully investigated and institutional actions were not always proportionate or timely in addressing the severity of the concerns. Across cases, there were inconsistencies in what constituted harm, how risks of harm were assessed, and where concerns met the threshold of an allegation that should have been formally addressed.

7. Institutions and staff did not consistently apply safeguarding policies and had narrow understandings of safeguarding responsibilities

The frequency and quality of safeguarding training varied significantly between institutions and was not always proportionate to roles that involved contact with children. Several cases referred to institutional social media policies which restricted or prohibited the use of social media to communicate with students, but application and enforcement of and compliance with these policies was often poor. There were contradictions between safeguarding policies, which made certain conduct or behaviour unacceptable, and institutional norms and practices which tolerated the behaviour. Cases where staff did not escalate and disclose concerns exemplified that safeguarding policies were not upheld at all levels by all members of staff, safeguarding 'responsibilities' were not always seen as everybody's business, and institutions may have found it challenging to navigate complex safeguarding processes.

Limitations and what is out of scope for the research

One of the key limitations of this research is that the conclusions drawn from the qualitative sample of 43 case files cannot be deemed representative of particular institutional contexts or 'types' of alleged perpetrators in England and Wales. However, the study presented a unique opportunity to examine aggregate themes of offending behaviours, abuse of trust relationships and failings at the institutional level, in relation to child sexual abuse.

This research did not involve any review of the DBS itself, and none of the research findings in this report are related to the DBS's remit or processes and procedures. The extent of the DBS's involvement was limited to the provision of case files for data analysis only. The research also did not consider other types of DBS cases, such as applications for enhanced disclosure (which is a pre-employment check), or autobar cases (where individuals are automatically barred from working in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults due to having been cautioned or convicted for a relevant offence).



CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This chapter provides information about the background and aims of this research.

1.1 Background to the Inquiry

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') was set up as a statutory inquiry in March 2015. The Inquiry has been tasked with considering 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 to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse.

1.2 Background to the research

The Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance (Working Together to Safeguard Children) sets out what organisations and agencies that work with children must and should do to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England. The guidance makes it clear that safeguarding children is a shared responsibility by all professionals and agencies working across local authorities, statutory and non-statutory and voluntary sectors. The guidance places emphasis on multi-agency information sharing and referrals, multi-agency assessments and interventions, and appropriate and timely referrals for children at risk. There are also a number of statutory duties to protect and support children at risk of homelessness, children in the care system or criminal justice system, children with disabilities and children who are young carers.

Despite increasing institutional safeguards over recent years, and a growth in research into child sexual abuse in institutions, there is still a lack of knowledge in relation to child sexual abuse perpetrated in contemporary institutional contexts.

The aim of this study was to better understand the offending behaviours of perpetrators who sexually abused children across a broad range of contemporary institutional contexts in England and Wales ('contemporary' was defined in this study as 2017 onwards). The study also examined the circumstances and situational factors related to how child sexual abuse was perpetrated in a range of institutional contexts, and how institutions and professionals identified, reported and responded to risks of child sexual abuse. The study contributes to the wider evidence base concerned with tackling child sexual abuse and may assist policy makers and practitioners in better understanding institutional grooming, abuse of trust and safeguarding in institutional contexts, thereby improving prevention of and response to child sexual abuse.

This research is the first of its kind,³ analysing contemporary records (2017–2020) from the Disclosure and Barring Service, involving both male and female individuals added to the Children's Barred List.

To make a significant contribution to existing knowledge in this area, this research:

- focused on child sexual abuse across a broad range of institutional contexts **in England and Wales**, including contexts where there is limited research on child sexual abuse, such as sports and leisure and voluntary and community sectors;

3 This study builds on another small-scale study which analysed DBS case files (Darling and Antonopoulos, 2013).

- focused on perpetrator **behaviours** and the **contexts** in which child sexual abuse occurs;
- examined **contemporary** data from the last five years;
- examined **institutional responses** to the behaviours of individuals sexually abusing children within institutional contexts; and
- involved **in-depth qualitative case file analysis** to address the significant gap in knowledge around perpetrator offending in institutional contexts, inter-agency working and related situational factors.

1.3 Research aims

The aims of this research were to examine contemporary cases to:

- 1 Explore how and where perpetrators sexually groomed and abused children in different institutional contexts;
- 2 Examine institutional responses to perpetrators who sexually abused children, including reporting, escalation and actions; and
- 3 Identify other factors which inhibited or facilitated the perpetration of child sexual abuse.

Two broad research questions were addressed:

- 1 What is known about perpetrators of child sexual abuse, their offending strategies and the nature of child sexual abuse in a broad range of contemporary institutional contexts?
- 2 How do institutions and professionals currently identify, report and respond to risks and allegations of child sexual abuse?

This report builds on some of the Inquiry's previous research on perpetrators and institutions, including:

- Truth Project thematic reports analysing the experiences of victims and survivors.
- Rapid evidence assessment behaviour and characteristics of perpetrators of online facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation (DeMarco et al., 2018), which considered how perpetrators used specific technologies to offend and how the availability of these technologies influenced perpetrators' behaviour.
- An explorative study on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation convicted alongside others (Senker, et al., 2020), which aimed to further an understanding of the motivations and strategies of perpetrators of child sexual exploitation who were convicted alongside others.

1.4 Notes on terminology

Set out below are terms relevant to the research that will be used throughout this report. Extracts from the case files have been redacted to protect the anonymity of individuals. However, to preserve the authenticity of the extracts, original case file data presented throughout this report has not been edited to reflect the terminology preferences outlined below.

See the glossary in Appendix B for an explanation of the terms and acronyms used in this report.

1.4.1 Child sexual abuse

The term 'child sexual abuse' refers to behaviours that involve forcing or enticing a child or young person, under the age of 18, to take part in physical contact or non-contact sexual activities. This includes the production of sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for sexual abuse including via the internet. Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation. Where the child is aged between 16 or 17 and the alleged perpetrator is aged 18 or over and in a 'position of trust', this is also considered a sexual offence and is discussed later in this section.

1.4.2 Contemporary institutional contexts

We use the term 'contemporary' to highlight the fact that all discretionary case files in the study are from 2017 onwards and hence provide a very recent insight into child sexual abuse in England and Wales. Institutions can be defined as: domains of human interaction that are distinguished from one another by their organising principles that take the form of distinct values, beliefs and norms. Institutions regulate the behaviour of organisations and their participants (Palmer, 2017). We mostly refer to 'institutional contexts' because the case files included instances where: (i) the child sexual abuse took place within the institution's physical premises (for example, a school) as well as or in addition to: (ii) the alleged perpetrator and victim were both linked to the same institution (for example, a teacher and a pupil), even if the child sexual abuse took place in a different location. We include 'bricks and mortar' institutions, such as schools and hospitals, in our definition of 'institutional contexts' but also foster care and sports contexts where children were sexually abused by someone linked to an institution.

Please note that we use 'sectors' to describe the sample, such as the healthcare or education sector, to mirror the language used by the DBS.

1.4.3 DBS discretionary referral cases

The data analysed for this research are DBS discretionary referral case files. For simplicity, these data sources are sometimes referred to as 'cases' or 'case files'. DBS discretionary cases are referrals made about individuals to the DBS where there are, or have been, concerns about that individual's behaviour with children or vulnerable adults which have led to them being removed from or leaving their position. These cases engage the discretionary decision-making powers of DBS unless the behaviour results in a caution or conviction for a prescribed offence; such cases are reclassified as 'autobar' cases (see Appendix A1 on types of DBS referrals).

1.4.4 Alleged perpetrators and barred individuals

The individuals concerned in discretionary referrals do not have a conviction or caution for the offending behaviour of concern that resulted in the DBS referral. We refer to these individuals:

- as 'alleged perpetrators' when describing events which took place before an individual was referred to the DBS and added to the Children's Barred list, and
- as 'barred individuals' when describing the sample or when describing events which took place after an individual was added to the Children's Barred list.

The report refers to 'perpetrators' when discussing academic literature to remain consistent with the language used in the published research.

1.4.5 Position of trust

'Position of trust' is a legal term which refers to roles in which an adult has regular and direct contact caring for, supervising, training or being in sole charge of children. According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is unlawful for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child in their care, even if the child is over 16 years old and above the age of consent. Teachers, social workers, doctors, foster carers and police officers – among others – are those legally within a 'position of trust'. At the time of writing this report, in March 2021, a bill⁴ was introduced to parliament proposing to expand the position of trust definition to include sports coaches and religious leaders, in response to recommendations made in the Inquiry's Anglican Church Investigation Report (Jay et al., 2019) and campaigns by victims and survivors also calling for this change. At the time of reporting, sports coaches and religious leaders were not covered by the existing position of trust laws.

1.4.6 'Abusive relationships' between alleged perpetrators and victims

'Sexual abuse' and 'relationships' can be conflated by both adults and children, particularly when the victim is an adolescent or there is a small age gap between the adults and children. This is influenced by a belief that adolescents, especially those above the age of consent, are more sexually aware and have more agency and autonomy than younger children (see Hallett, 2017; Melrose, 2013). This can perpetuate a victim-blaming narrative and adolescents may not recognise the abusive nature of interactions which 'resemble' a consensual relationship at the time (Harper and Scott, 2005). Acknowledging the complexity of these dynamics, in this report relationships between children and alleged perpetrators are referred to as 'abusive relationships'.

1.4.7 Grooming

Grooming has been defined as: (1) the use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques; (2) with a vulnerable subject; (3) in a range of interpersonal and social settings; (4) in order to establish trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour; (5) with the overall aim of facilitating exploitation and/or prohibiting exposure (McAlinden, 2012). The significance of this definition is that it makes clear that grooming is not just about getting access in order to 'set up' abuse but is also about preventing disclosure. This distinction is important because in institutional contexts, where the alleged perpetrator may be already proximate to the victim, there is no need to groom for access. Grooming can therefore involve maintenance and control. Further, its principal feature is the normalisation of abusive behaviours so that: a) the behaviour goes undetected by others; and b) the victim themselves may often not realise they have been groomed or abused (McAlinden, 2012).

4 The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021 was still being debated at the time of writing this report.



CHAPTER 2: What is known about child sexual abuse in institutional contexts

This chapter provides a brief overview of existing research on child sexual abuse across a broad range of institutional contexts, focusing on what is known about perpetrators' offending behaviour, how perpetrators interact with institutions and institutional responses to offending behaviours.

The purpose of this review is to situate our research findings within the broader research knowledge base. The review focused on literature published between 2000 and 2020, with some key literature published pre-2000 also included. There was a focus on research from England and Wales, but relevant literature from other jurisdictions was also drawn on where appropriate (for example, the Australian report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, in 2017). The review draws on sources including journal articles and reports, including the Inquiry's Truth Project research reports.

Summary of the literature review

- There is limited recent UK-based research which considers perpetrator behaviour and characteristics across institutions.
- Much of the existing body of literature considers child sexual abuse either in specific contexts (for example, schools or churches) or outside of institutional contexts, including child sexual abuse which has occurred inside and outside of families.
- Research suggests that there are similarities in the behaviours exhibited by institutional perpetrators of child sexual abuse across contexts, and this shares some similarities with offending outside of institutions (for example, sexual grooming strategies).
- Previous work suggests perpetrators of child sexual abuse in institutions may have a higher level of social competence⁵ compared to other types of sexual perpetrators.
- Institutions are typically poor at detecting child sexual abuse and some generally discourage the highlighting of their deficiencies. Factors such as a lack of guidance for those who have a responsibility to report child sexual abuse, a lack of protection for those who wish to report, and poor responses to identifying and disclosing sexual abuse, create distinct barriers to reporting sexual abuse within institutional contexts.

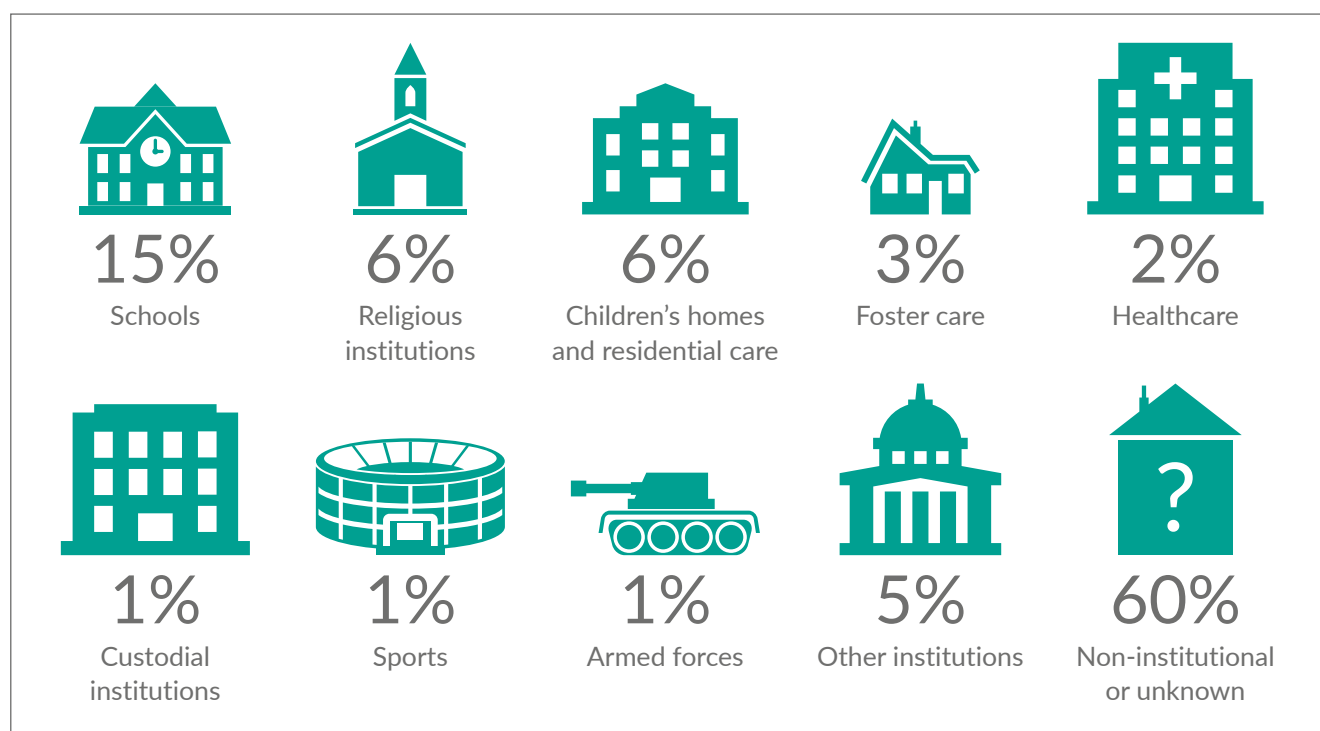
5 This refers to a person's ability to interact successfully and effectively with others.

2.1 Characteristics and offending strategies of institutional perpetrators

2.1.1 Institutional contexts where perpetrators sexually abuse children

Research shows that child sexual abuse takes place in a wide range of institutional contexts. The Inquiry's most recent [Truth Project Dashboard](#)⁶ (Truth Project, 2020) showed that 40 percent of victims and survivors who shared an experience of child sexual abuse with the Truth Project described at least one episode of sexual abuse that took place within an institutional location. Schools were the most frequently named location. Finch et al. (2021), in their systematic review of interventions in institutional maltreatment of children, also pointed out that most of the research they reviewed took place in educational contexts. The remaining 60 percent of victims and survivors who shared an experience of child sexual abuse with the Truth Project were sexually abused outside the physical premises of an institution; however the perpetrator was linked to an institution or the victim and survivor was let down by someone in authority within an institution.

Figure 2.1: Child sexual abuse reported by [Truth Project](#) participants between June 2016 and December 2020 across institutional contexts



Source: [Truth Project Dashboard](#)

⁶ The Truth Project Dashboard (June 2016–December 2020) was based on the accounts of 5,104 victims and survivors who shared their experiences of child sexual abuse with the Inquiry's Truth Project. This was a self-selecting sample. 'Other institutions' refers to any type of institution not captured by the other categories. 'Non-institutional or unknown' includes familial child sexual abuse where the perpetrator was linked to an institution, but the sexual abuse took place in or around the family home, or the victim and survivor was sexually abused by a family member but let down by someone in authority within an institution.

Operation Hydrant⁷ (NPCC, 2020) reported that the total number of victims on its database, from 2014 until December 2020, was 10,836; and the total number of alleged perpetrators known to Operation Hydrant, within the same timeframe, was 7,970.

In relation to institutional contexts that are included on the Operation Hydrant database, there are:

- 1,872 educational institutions
- 736 children's homes
- 545 religious institutions
- 447 sport institutions
- 435 children and young people's associations and clubs.

2.1.2 Characteristics of perpetrators of child sexual abuse within institutions

The Australian Royal Commission's research into institutional responses to child sexual abuse in Australia (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017:126, Volume 2) noted, *"there is no typical profile of an adult who sexually abuses a child, despite commonly held misconceptions and persistent stereotypes. People who sexually abuse children in institutional contexts have diverse motivations and behaviours, which are influenced by various factors that can change over time."*

However, much of the research did highlight the concept of 'social competency' in relation to perpetrators of sexual abuse in institutions. This refers to perpetrators achieving positive standing within their communities, maintaining successful adult-to-adult relationships, and holding respected roles in institutions, which made it harder to identify them (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 2).

Researchers also discussed two types of archetypal perpetrators.

- First, a *"charismatic, articulate, well networked 'caring professional' who is usually a part of the leadership of the institution"*.
- Secondly, an *"... isolated but dutiful staff member who is perhaps over helpful to colleagues and children, and frequently does things outside the normal duties"* (Erooga et al., 2012:58).

Other research (Shakeshaft, 2004) highlights perceptions of perpetrators as being 'nice', even revered, perhaps demonstrating 'charismatic power', *"a quality that can either induce extreme devotion or liking in people for those they see as leaders and/or alternatively can lead to allegiance through fear and intimidation"* (Green, 2001:15). Perpetrators therefore commonly presented themselves as benign individuals, well perceived by colleagues, communities and peers, going over and above their duties: enabling them to hide in plain sight.

⁷ Operation Hydrant collates, cross-references and shares information relating to investigations into non-recent child sexual abuse that involves an institution, organisation or persons of public prominence, across police forces.

The research reviewed⁸ offers some general characteristics of institutional perpetrators of child sexual abuse, suggesting that:

- Institutional (male) perpetrators were able to control their behaviour (to outsiders) while also offence planning (Moulden et al., 2010).
- Institutional perpetrators had higher levels of sexual preoccupation and emotional over-identification with children (Sullivan et al., 2011).
- Male and female perpetrators of sexual abuse in institutional contexts exhibited shared characteristics (Kaufman et al., 2016). Overall, both male and female institutional perpetrators were said to be older, better educated, had higher IQs and reported fewer adverse childhood experiences than general perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Darling and Antonopoulos, 2013).
- Similar grooming methods were found across genders, suggesting male and female institutional offenders were equally unlikely to be under the influence of alcohol, were likely to abuse power and authority to facilitate abuse, and to commit similar sexual acts against their victims (Moulden et al., 2007).
- Male teachers, relative to female teachers, were more likely to engage in more severe abuse (Christensen and Darling, 2020), and more likely to abuse older victims (13 years and over), (Ratliff and Watson, 2014).
- The mid-thirties was a commonly cited age for first offences. This is distinct from the age of the perpetrator when the offence was reported or investigated (Darling, et al., 2018; Moulden et al., 2007).
- Institutional perpetrators were less likely to have had previous sexual convictions compared to intrafamilial and other extrafamilial offenders (Sullivan et al., 2011).
- While many institutional perpetrators (male and female) were single, or had not had a sexual adult relationship, a proportion were also married or in a relationship (Leclerc et al., 2015; Erooga et al., 2012; Moulden et al., 2007).
- Institutional perpetrators (male and female) reported experiencing life stress, mental health problems or a change in life circumstances at the time of their offending, for example, sexual identity crises, marital or relationship problems, but they denied that this played a role in their behaviour (Erooga et al., 2012).

8 Please note this is a brief summary of the general characteristics of perpetrators in institutions that were found within the reviewed research. Research varied as to whether it specified the gender of the institutional perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Where gender was explicit in the research, it is also made explicit in this report.

2.1.3 Types of perpetrators

There are a number of typologies which are relevant to institutional perpetrators of child sexual abuse. A useful typology, although developed on male perpetrators of child sexual abuse outside of institutions, highlights the interaction of individual and situational factors, leading to three types of offenders: predatory, situational and opportunistic (see Table 2.1) (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006).

Table 2.1: Summary of predatory, opportunistic and situational perpetrators

Type of offender	Typical behaviour
Predatory offender: a high frequency, chronic perpetrator.	Likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have had their first sexual contact with a child at an early age • sexually abuse male victims and have more frequent and extended contact with victims • draw upon a well-honed set of skills to identify vulnerable children and offend against them
Opportunistic offender: same motivations for offending as a predatory offender but more inclined to adhere to personal and external constraints.	Likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimise their behaviour and deny personal responsibility for harm • offend against females • start offending at a later age (than a predatory offender) • be unable to inhibit their sexual urges and offend when the opportunity to gratify a sexual urge presents itself
Situational offender: typified by no other offending behaviour.	Likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begin offending as an adult, following behavioural and environmental cues and stressors as well as or in addition to after a <i>“moment of intimacy with the child that proved stimulating”</i> (2006:16)

Adapted from Wortley and Smallbone (2006)

For institutional contexts, however, it is important to point out that not all perpetrators purposefully commence employment with a view to sexually abusing children; while some do (i.e. the predatory offender type), for others the motivation to offend (consciously or unconsciously) only comes into play when they are within the institution (i.e. situational or opportunistic types). This is important because it has implications for protective policies and vetting in particular, especially when the individual may have had no prior record of offending (McAlinden, 2012).

Other research, based on those who abuse children within educational institutions, highlighted additional types of perpetrator behaviour and how it was rationalised or explained by perpetrators: ‘minimisers and deniers’ who initially denied their behaviour and then played down the seriousness of it;⁹ perpetrators who showed some remorse for their offending and tried to mitigate it with descriptions of poor mental health or stressors; and perpetrators who offended against victims aged between 16 and 18 years, who *“appeared to consent to the sexual activity”* (Christensen and Darling, 2020).

⁹ This does not always link to recidivism (Maruna and Mann, 2006).

2.2 How institutional child sexual abuse is perpetrated

This section relates to the ways in which child sexual abuse takes place. This includes the locations where the offences were committed (for example, whether this was at locations internal or external to the institution), as well as the sexual grooming and offending strategies used by perpetrators and how this interacts with institutional factors.

2.2.1 Locations of child sexual abuse

The research review illustrated that many incidents of child sexual abuse took place away from the institution, for example at the offender's or victim's residence as well as or in addition to in public places (Moulden et al., 2010). Private or hidden environments were also exploited by perpetrators as sites for child sexual abuse. This was found to be an enabling factor in other Inquiry Truth Project research into child sexual abuse in schools and healthcare contexts (see Brown et al., 2020; Zammit et al., 2020). Research on female and male perpetrators within educational institutions indicated sexual abuse occurred at a higher rate outside of rather than inside school, for example at the cinema, church, perpetrator's home or car (Christensen and Darling, 2020). This has also been replicated in studies on female perpetrators, which have found that most abuse perpetrated by women occurred outside of the institutional environment (Darling, Hackett and Jamie, 2018; Darling and Hackett, 2020).

The growing and widespread use of social media and technology means sexual grooming and sexual abuse can occur online. The role of technology as a means of 'legitimate' communication in some institutional contexts can also enable contact outside of working hours to take place. For example, Darling and colleagues (2018) noted cases where contact online between perpetrators and children was initially about school trips or exam results in educational contexts, before progressing to inappropriate and sexually abusive exchanges.

2.2.2 Tools, tactics and strategies for child sexual abuse

Romito (2008) suggested a framework, in the broader context of male violence against women and children, that can be applied to understanding child sexual abuse and sexual grooming behaviour by male and female perpetrators in institutional contexts. It consists of six strategies used by perpetrators, and enabled by wider patriarchal structures, cultures and practices. These are:

- **Euphemising** – where language is used to minimise child sexual abuse (for example, referring to child sexual abuse as 'sex with an under-age girl').
- **Dehumanising** – where individuals are referred to as animals or consumer goods (for example, 'bitch', 'prostitute').
- **Blaming** – whereby perpetrators shift the focus and responsibility for child sexual abuse from them onto the victim, and others.
- **Psychologising** – allows perpetrators to blame psychological or biological conditions as the cause of child sexual abuse, resulting in therapeutic rather than criminal responses.
- **Naturalising** – positioning child sexual abuse as a natural result of hormones, for example men's sexual urges and 'inability' to control their sexual desires.
- **Separating** – presents different forms of violence as distinct from each other when they are often similar and perpetrated by the same group.

These tactics have been used together by perpetrators, consciously or unconsciously, and institutions, in different ways to legitimise as well as, or in addition to, deny sexual violence and sexual grooming of children (Romito, 2008). When child sexual abuse is legitimised by perpetrators or institutions, it may occur in plain sight because it is normalised and perceived as legitimate (for example, through euphemising the child sexual abuse as 'a relationship'). Where the child sexual abuse cannot be legitimised, denial is used as the strategy to hide it.

Sexual grooming within child sexual abuse has been considered using the validated sexual grooming model. This model proposes five stages of in-person sexual grooming:

- 1 victim selection
- 2 gaining access and isolating a child
- 3 trust development
- 4 desensitisation to sexual content and physical contact, and
- 5 maintenance following the abuse (Winters et al., 2020).

Research specifically into institutional child sexual abuse has highlighted perpetrators' use of non-violent, non-coercive strategies, or 'entrapment' (Gallagher, 2000) with a focus on building trusting relationships with children. This tactic allows perpetrators to simultaneously prevent disclosure and facilitate access to victims, often because the victim does not recognise the perpetrator's behaviour as abusive and believes they are in a relationship with the perpetrator, or does not want to get the perpetrator into trouble (Darling and Hackett, 2020). Similarities have been found in the sexual grooming methods used by perpetrators in institutions compared to perpetrators of sexual offences more generally (Erooga et al., 2012). However, a unique feature that distinguishes perpetrators offending within institutions is the imbalance of power between institutional offenders and victims. The term 'institutional grooming' has been used to highlight that perpetrators' sexual grooming strategies extend beyond victims to broader institutional environments, staff, peers and victims' families, as a tactic to cultivate silence, generate trust and alleviate suspicions (Kaufman et al., 2016; McAlinden, A.M., 2006).

Previous work has indicated that vulnerability in victims, arising as a result of poor or 'neglectful' parenting, enabled perpetrators to step into parental roles to create a sense of 'closeness' to the victim (Smith and Freyd, 2014). Researchers have distinguished between identifying vulnerability and manipulating vulnerability in order to sexually abuse; the latter being far more common among perpetrators within institutions (Erooga et al., 2012). This orchestrates situations where a child's vulnerability is more pronounced, such as creating a dependency on the perpetrator that can be utilised for the perpetrator's gain. Perpetrators in positions of trust have been noted to demonstrate behaviours under the guise of 'love' and 'affection' towards victims to gradually desensitise them to physical touch and introduce the concept of sex and sexual activity (Leclerc et al., 2005). The role of these 'boundary violations' have been discussed elsewhere (see Erooga, 2019) as well as the challenges in restoring relationships to appropriate ones once such violations have occurred. Boundary violations may also be rationalised as positive or normal (for example, hugging a child), without being recognised as a warning sign by colleagues and peers (Erooga, 2009).

Research highlights how certain factors can increase the opportunities for child sexual abuse to occur within institutions. For example, when perpetrators work in isolation within the institution, have a strong standing and a responsibility for particularly vulnerable or challenging children (Erooga et al., 2012). Similar factors were found to facilitate child sexual abuse in school settings, particularly regarding the ‘strong standing’ a perpetrator held within the institution (Brown et al., 2020). Some research has suggested that female perpetrated child sexual abuse was considered, by professionals, to be less serious, harmful and deserving of an investigation. This perception can be seen to facilitate female perpetrated sexual abuse or, rather, make its detection and disclosure less likely (Clements et al., 2014).

Research has also highlighted that perpetrators are often able to take advantage of the policies, procedures and physical spaces within institutions to exploit their position or role (Palmer, 2017). For example, perpetrators, such as sports coaches, were expected to have a close physical relationship with their players, which facilitated sexual abuse and gives less scope for people to challenge such ‘closeness’ (Sheldon, 2021; Darling et al., 2020b; Smith and Freyd, 2014). Some perpetrators exploited the trust afforded to them in their role to use their “*cloak of respectability and credibility*” (Sheldon, 2021:14) to cultivate opportunities for sexual abuse, in effect hiding in plain sight. Often the victim developed a belief that the abusive behaviour was appropriate (Palmer and Feldman, 2018). Recent work from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2020) has considered abuse which relates to institutional perpetrators, described as “*child sexual abuse through trusted relationships outside the family environment*”. This includes features such as: the perpetrator being perceived to be someone who can be trusted because of the role they hold; access to the victim being facilitated by the esteem in which the perpetrator is held by the local community; and the sexual abuse involving a grooming process, beginning as an appropriate relationship before escalating into an abusive one. Specifically, the sexual abuse may be disguised as affection and the victim may believe they are in an intimate relationship with the perpetrator. It may also involve promises of gifts or privileges to the victim, in exchange for their continued engagement in – or silence about – the sexual abuse.

2.3 The role of institutions in child sexual abuse

This section considers how the culture of an institution can influence the perpetration of, and responses to, child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse in institutions can only exist if the structural and organisational culture allows it (Palmer and Feldman, 2018), and the perpetration and detection of it can be influenced by the nature of the institution. There are several unique features of institutional environments that make them conducive to abuse, such as the fact that institutions are often self-protective or ‘closed’ by nature (McAlinden, 2006). In particular, the role of ‘trust’ which is key to both intra-familial abuse and institutional abuse is key.

A ‘strong’ institution proactively prevents wrongdoing from occurring (ie child sexual abuse), and responds effectively to such wrongdoing; whereas a ‘weak’ institution may contribute to, or fail to reduce or prevent wrongdoing (Palmer, 2017). Palmer and Feldman (2018) identified five organisational structures as enabling or minimising the perpetration, the detection of, and responses to child sexual abuse (see Table 2.2 on the next page). On this theoretical basis, it is likely that weak institutions are more likely to lack robust organisational structures and to fail to protect children.

Table 2.2: Types of organisational structures in institutions

Types of organisational structures	
Incentive systems	Systems that promote or prevent some behaviours through 'rewards' or 'sanctions' in terms of reporting and safeguarding.
Administrative systems	These guide and monitor behaviour and practices, establish and enforce rules, and influence the strength of policies and procedures for detection and responding to child sexual abuse.
Power structures	Formal structures – such as lines of authority within organisations. They can be problematic if there is only a single chain of command in relation to reporting child sexual abuse. Informal structures – such as people having different levels of access to resources, can also impede the detection of child sexual abuse and negatively impact on opportunities to report it.
Cultural arrangements and understandings	There are many types of cultural arrangements that may contribute to child sexual abuse in organisations, based on understandings of gender, intimacy and affection, sexual character of behaviour, violence, and childhood.
Institutional processes and structures	For example, prioritising organisational reputation over the needs of victims and survivors; an emphasis on profits; the normalisation of misconduct and bypassing safeguarding processes.

Source: Palmer and Feldman (2018)

Similarly, the findings of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017; Volume 2) also highlighted the role of cultural, operational and environmental factors within an institution. The culture of an institution is created primarily by those in leadership positions, through the way in which they model behaviour and communicate assumptions, values and beliefs. Volume 2 of the Australian Royal Commission report discussed key cultural factors that occurred in institutions which increased the risk of child sexual abuse. These were cultures that lacked understanding or awareness of child sexual abuse, failed to listen to and educate children about healthy relationships, prioritised the reputation of the institution, and cultivated secrecy and isolation. Many of these practices become normalised. Goffman (1961) discussed characteristics of 'total institutions' as having complete dominance over its members, often in an environment where the members tended to live a closed life, cut off from wider society for a significant amount of time, for example residential hospitals, custodial institutions and residential schools.

'Institutional betrayal', which includes child sexual abuse, starts with the creation of trust by those in positions of power or authority or care of a child, followed then by the subsequent betrayal of that trust. This can contribute to a culture of institutional denial and a 'group cohesion' mechanism whereby victims, or those who make allegations, are discredited, disbelieved or isolated (Smith and Freyd, 2014). This can lead to the phenomenon of group 'not knowing' and a fear of 'whistleblowing' despite policies promoting this. This has been discussed in healthcare contexts where those who do 'whistleblow' are applauded by some and villainised or coined as 'snitches' by others (Mannion and Davies, 2015). Other research has highlighted cases where sexual harassment is widespread in workplaces or education contexts, known by everybody but never raised or reported as inappropriate, creating a sense of a cultural silence (see Brown et al., 2020; Zammit et al., 2020).

2.3.1 Detecting and responding to sexual abuse

Literature highlighted that institutional child sexual abuse is grossly under-reported and that institutions were typically poor at detecting it (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 7). Employers and colleagues have found it difficult to detect incidents of sexual grooming because the tactics used by perpetrators are subtle, sustained over time and occur outside of the workplace or institution, as well as within (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 2). Furthermore, because sexual grooming behaviours are difficult to detect before a contact sexual offence and actual harm have occurred, these behaviours are often normalised. A lack of guidance for those who had a responsibility to report child sexual abuse, and a lack of protection for those who wished to report it, were examples of two factors that contributed to institutions not detecting or reporting incidents of child sexual abuse (McKenna et al., 2012). Other research highlighted that there may be early warning signs of inappropriate behaviour by perpetrators that had been detected and raised as concerns by colleagues before child sexual abuse was disclosed. However, employers and senior management failed to take appropriate action (McKenna et al., 2012; Darling and Hackett, 2020).

Darling and Hackett (2020), in their work on female perpetrators in institutions, found that child sexual abuse occurred as a result of a lack of supervision, alongside a failure to sufficiently address inappropriate behaviour and conduct. They noted the need for 'bystanders' to have a shared responsibility of safeguarding children in institutions, especially if colleagues, line managers and guardians did not raise concerns.

Furthermore, if perpetrators within institutions were to fall into the situational type (see Table 2.1 above), it could be more difficult to detect and prevent the sexual abuse in advance through employment vetting checks (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006), suggesting a different type of prevention method may be required.

Westcott (1991) suggested that institutions are 'self protecting', and generally discourage the highlighting of deficiencies. This is similar to Palmer's (2017) concept of weak institutions and can create distinct barriers to reporting sexual abuse within institutional contexts. Work from Palmer (2017) and the Australian Royal Commission (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volumes 6–8) has made reference to the dangers associated with inadequate policies and procedures, including poor information sharing and record keeping. Institutional avenues for making safe disclosures, reporting and investigating concerns are necessary. Poor institutional responses are exacerbated if a complaint of institutional sexual abuse is viewed as a problem with the perpetrator, not the institution (for example, blaming or punishing the victim).

'Betrayal blindness' describes situations where individuals might minimise, ignore or deny an incident by a friend, family member or other trusted adult in order to protect themselves, particularly where there are strong personal relationships between adults within institutions, or conflicts of interest for individuals in the institution (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017:148; Volume 4). Clear pathways for reporting child sexual abuse, robust organisational structures and institutional cultures which prioritise safeguarding are all important elements for detecting and preventing child sexual abuse.



CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the data collection, sample, data analysis and ethical considerations of the research.

3.1 Data collection

The data collected and analysed for this research were case files concerning discretionary decisions to bar, obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).¹⁰ The DBS is a public body which “*makes considered decisions about whether somebody should be barred from engaging in regulated activity*” (Gov.UK, 2019). Examples of roles which could fall under regulated activity include teaching or providing health and personal care to vulnerable adults or children.¹¹ These cases are referred to as ‘discretionary cases’ throughout this report.

The Inquiry obtained the DBS case files through a Rule 9 written request for documentation in July 2020, in line with The Inquiry Rules 2006. The Inquiry received a list of all 544 DBS cases, in which individuals were added to the Children’s Barred List on discretionary grounds and on the grounds of sexual harm, between September 2017 and June 2020.¹² DBS discretionary cases are referrals about individuals made to the DBS by organisations, where there are, or have been, concerns about that individual’s behaviour with children or vulnerable adults which have led to them being removed from or leaving their position. These cases engage the discretionary decision-making powers of the DBS unless the behaviour results in a caution or conviction for a prescribed offence; such cases are reclassified as ‘autobar’ cases (see Appendix A1 on DBS referrals and discretionary case file information).

DBS discretionary cases may represent cases which have not necessarily met a criminal threshold¹³ or for some other reason have not resulted in a criminal prosecution, for example due to a lack of evidence. Often the criminal prosecution of these types of cases fails because victims or witnesses withdraw their allegations or statements.

Referrals are processed by the DBS in the following stages:

- 1 Initial assessment, including establishing links to regulating activity;
- 2 Information gathering and assessment to establish on the balance of probabilities whether ‘relevant conduct’¹⁴ appears to have occurred or a risk of harm appears to exist;

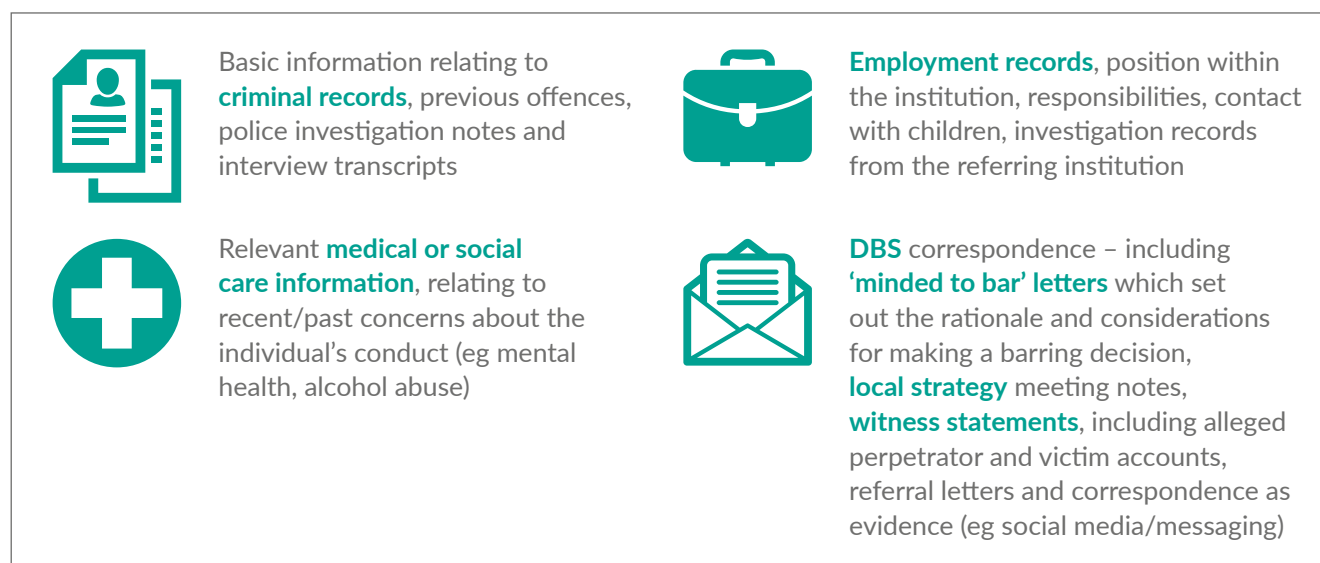
10 The DBS processes disclosure functions for England, Wales, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, and operates barring functions for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

11 According to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (SVGA), amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (PoFA), a child is defined as a person who has not attained the age of 18. A vulnerable adult is defined as a person aged over 18 receiving one of the following services: healthcare; relevant personal care; social care work; assistance in relation to general household matters by reason of age, illness or disability; relevant assistance in the conduct of their own affairs; or conveying (due to age, illness or disability in prescribed circumstances).

12 This time period refers explicitly to the point in which a DBS barring decision was made and a case was concluded; however, cases in our sample were referred to the DBS prior to this, ranging from 2015–2019.

13 Discretionary cases may still become autobar cases if new evidence (such as in non-recent cases) comes to light after a barring decision has been made, resulting in a criminal conviction.

14 Relevant conduct refers to actions/inaction that endangers a child such as sexual and/or violent materials and conduct.

Figure 3.1: Examples of the type of information contained within DBS discretionary case files

- 3 A structured judgement process or other risk assessment tool may be used at this stage to determine whether an individual should be included in the Children's Barred List as well as or in addition to the Adults' Barred Lists because they pose a risk to vulnerable people; individuals who the DBS propose to include on a barred list are provided with the opportunity to make representations;
- 4 Consideration of representations and assessment of whether it changes the DBS's view regarding links to regulated activity, relevant conduct or risk of harm, and any risk assessment; and
- 5 A final appropriateness decision is then made regarding inclusion in one or both barred lists.

This research has drawn only on 'discretionary referral cases', because they contained the most detailed information from a wide range of sources, and were therefore more likely to hold sufficient information related to the research questions (see Appendix A1 on DBS referrals and discretionary case file information).

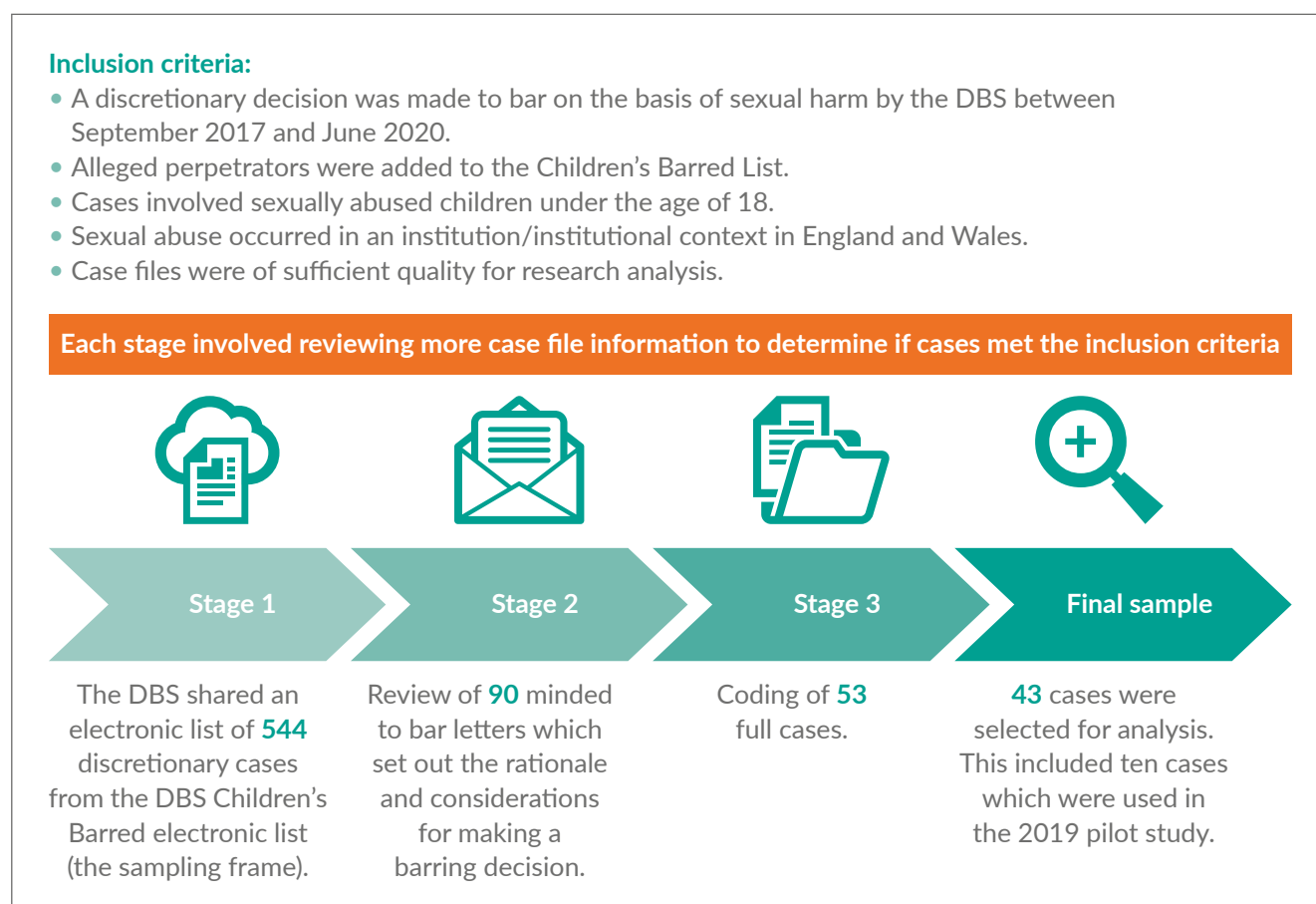
DBS discretionary case files consist of different information sources and evidence relating to the barred individuals and the alleged child sexual abuse. Examples of the type and range of information contained within the case files analysed in this study is presented in Figure 3.1 and Appendix A1.

This research did not involve any review of the DBS itself and none of the research findings in this report are related to the DBS's remit or processes and procedures. The extent of the DBS's involvement was limited to the provision of case files for data analysis only.

3.2 Sample

The DBS shared an electronic list of 544 discretionary referral cases where a decision had been made to add an individual to the Children's Barred List. The list included ten cases which the research team had previously used in a pilot study in 2019, to determine the feasibility of qualitative analysis of DBS discretionary case files. Of these 544 cases, 43 were selected for the final sample and this included the ten cases used in the pilot study. The final sample was selected through a purposeful sampling approach which involved reviewing each case against the inclusion criteria outlined in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Inclusion criteria and the sample selection process



The sample was selected through a staged approach.

Stage 1: The first stage involved two phases:

- (i) reviewing high level information contained within the DBS electronic list pertaining to all 544 cases against the inclusion criteria (see Figure 3.2). Cases were excluded where there was missing information, for example about the sector or referring organisation.
- (ii) From all case files that met the inclusion criteria, 90 cases¹⁵ were purposefully selected against quotas for the following variables to achieve a spread of cases:
 - jurisdiction: England and Wales;
 - gender:¹⁶ male and female barred individuals; and
 - sectors:¹⁷ education, voluntary and community, sports and leisure, foster care, social care, childcare, faith and healthcare sectors.

15 The 2019 feasibility study informed the decision to select a longlist of 90 cases and determined that this would result in a final sample of 40–50 cases eligible for analysis. This was deemed to be a good sample size for qualitative research, as each case file consisted of an estimated 40–70 pages of data.

16 The term 'gender' is used instead of 'sex' because this is how the data is captured by the DBS. Barred individuals were only identifiable from DBS data as 'male' or 'female'.

17 Cases were categorised into sectors by the DBS.

Where there were limited numbers of cases to choose from within a particular sector (such as childcare, foster care and faith), all available cases which met the inclusion criteria were included in the sample. Similarly, all Welsh cases and cases involving female barred individuals which met the inclusion criteria were included in the sample and are over-represented.

Stage 2: The minded to bar letters were requested for all 90 cases and again reviewed against the inclusion criteria, as the letters contained more detailed information about the cases. 37 cases were eliminated on the basis that they did not meet the inclusion criteria, following a review of the minded to bar letters.

Stage 3: The full case files of the remaining 53 cases were requested, reviewed and coded, including the 10 cases from the feasibility study, which were re-coded. A further 10 cases were eliminated after the coding stage, on the basis that case file information revealed that they did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Final sample: This led to the selection of the final sample of 43 discretionary referral cases eligible for analysis. The barred individuals in the final sample of 43 cases were on average slightly younger at the time of barring (see Table 3.1). The final sample also included a higher proportion of female barred individuals than the larger sample frame because all cases which met the inclusion criteria and involved female barred individuals were purposefully selected, as described in Stage 1.

Table 3.1: Barred individuals' average¹⁸ age at the time of barring and gender in the full sample frame compared with the final sample

Barred individuals		Full sample frame (544 cases)	Final sample (43 cases)
Average age at the time of barring (years)		42	38
Gender	Male	495	32
	Female	49	11

Figure 3.3 on the next page sets out an overview of the 43 DBS discretionary cases analysed.¹⁹

See Appendix A2 for further sample details.

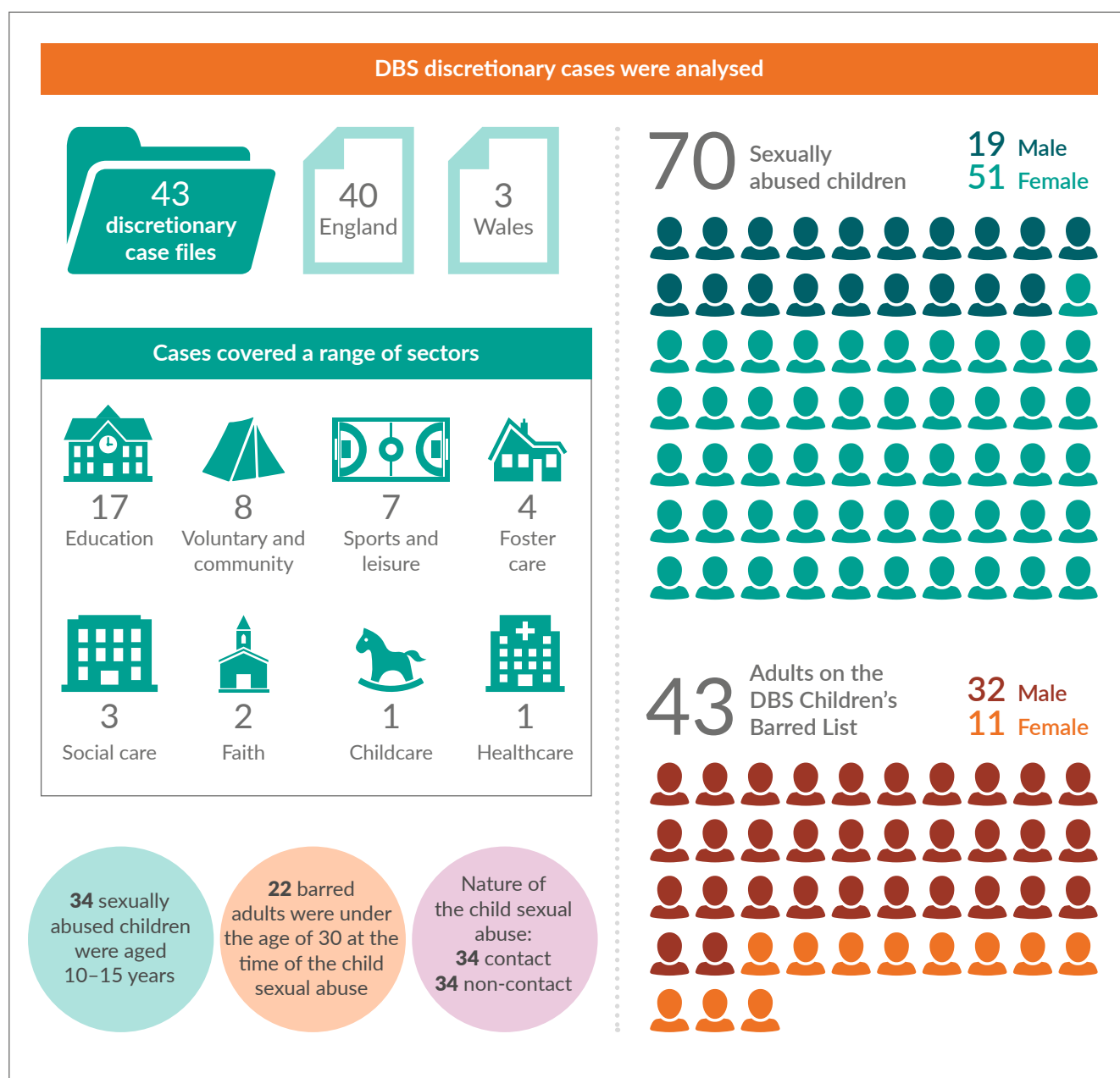
3.3 Data analysis

Qualitative case file analysis is commonly used in child protection research (Green et al., 2015). It is the retrospective analysis of administrative data or records for the purpose of answering research questions (Taylor, 2008). In this research study, data was thematically coded and analysed to identify aggregate themes and compare cases across different institutional contexts. Thematic analysis involves becoming familiar with the qualitative data, generating codes and identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Our focus was on examining: (i) common features of

¹⁸ All averages are based on the mean.

¹⁹ Some case files made reference to previous allegations but, as these were not the focus of the DBS case files, no further detail was provided so these cases were excluded. Thus, the 70 sexually abused children referenced in Figure 3.3 relate to the primary complaint/investigation that formed the DBS file and may be an underestimate.

Figure 3.3: Overview of the final sample



institutional failures to identify and respond to allegations of child sexual abuse; and (ii) similarities in offending behaviours and strategies across a range of contemporary institutional contexts.

Analysis tools from the feasibility study were adapted for this study. A code book and electronic coding framework were used to thematically code data into the following areas:

- demographics and characteristics of sexually abused children and alleged perpetrators;
- nature of the child sexual abuse;
- responses to allegations and reports of child sexual abuse by institutions and professionals; and
- institutional and situational factors (such as information relating to the organisational culture, physical environment and institutional policies and procedures).

The code book and coding framework were piloted and refined to ensure consistency in the coding approach. Ten cases were randomly selected and reviewed by a second coder for quality assurance purposes.

Case file analysis of DBS discretionary referral cases offers new and valuable insights into child sexual abuse across a range of contemporary institutional contexts. Benefits and limitations of the qualitative case file analysis approach and its application to DBS discretionary referral cases are outlined below.

3.3.1 Benefits

- Case files are a rich source of information and the qualitative case file analysis approach allows for in-depth and detailed analysis covering events over periods of months and sometimes years.
- Qualitative case file analysis is an unobtrusive methodology and researchers adopted the data minimisation principle, only collecting the minimum data needed to address the research questions.
- Case file analysis is a low-cost opportunity to analyse information from a range of sources, such as police files, social care records, institutional records, complex strategy meetings and witness statements.
- This is a unique opportunity to examine aggregate themes of offending behaviours and institutional responses to child sexual abuse in different contemporary institutional contexts. The project will inform research, policy and practice in the complex area of institutional grooming, abuse of trust behaviours and institutional responses to child safeguarding.

3.3.2 Limitations

- Case file data are not inherently objective. Information contained within the files are authored by different actors for different purposes. Case files were not designed for research purposes. The quality, completeness and range of evidence and information varied between cases. Case files have more information on consequences for alleged perpetrators than for sexually abused children, predictably, given the nature of the decision being made.
- Data from case files were not externally triangulated with any additional data, such as interviews with barred individuals or other stakeholders. Cases were, however, internally triangulated by comparing different accounts through the thematic analysis approach.
- Discretionary cases are not representative of all cases where the DBS has made a barring decision, as this would include all DBS case types, including applications for enhanced disclosure and auto-bar cases.
- Although the sample of 43 case files provided for a rich dataset for qualitative analysis, the findings and conclusions from this study cannot be deemed representative of particular institutional contexts or 'types' of alleged perpetrators. However, this research discusses failings at the institutional level and examines common failures across institutional contexts.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This project received ethical approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee in December 2019 to carry out case file analysis of DBS's discretionary referral cases. The project was subject to rigorous ethical scrutiny, including, for example, in the following areas:

- protection and processing of personal data;
- pseudonymisation and anonymisation measures to ensure confidentiality at each stage of the sampling and analysis approach; and
- wellbeing of the researchers.

To protect confidentiality, this report does not include details that would identify individuals, institutions or locations. All DBS cases were pseudonymised by the Inquiry's information management team prior to any coding or analysis. The pseudonymisation involved a rigorous quality assurance process conducted in line with Inquiry policy. Part of this process involved the redaction of DBS case reference numbers, along with the redaction of any other identifiable or personal information about individuals or institutions. Quotes and extracts from the case files have been checked and redacted to protect against jigsaw identification. To protect researchers, all supporting images, photos, media, audio or film content were removed from case files, before analysis. Therefore, researchers involved in this project only extracted non-identifying information. Case files were stored on secure IT drives. Access to case files, data collection and analysis tools was limited to the research and information management teams. Case file data was deleted and destroyed from the Inquiry's IT drives on publication of this report. The fully pseudonymised analysis framework will be retained for seven years after publication, in line with the Inquiry's retention policy.



CHAPTER 4: Characteristics of alleged perpetrators, victims, offending strategies and the nature of the child sexual abuse

This chapter sets out research findings on the characteristics of the alleged perpetrators who sexually abused children in institutional contexts, as well as the characteristics of those children (where this information was available from the case files). It describes the nature of the child sexual abuse, including information on the onset, timing, location and type of child sexual abuse. We also examined the offending strategies of alleged perpetrators, such as sexual grooming and situational factors at the time of the offence. The summary below provides an overview of the main points described in this chapter, based on the qualitative case file analysis.

Summary

- The majority of barred individuals in the sample were under the age of 35 years old at the time the child sexual abuse occurred.
- Many alleged perpetrators had worked or volunteered within the institutional context where the child sexual abuse occurred for a number of years before offending.
- Alleged perpetrators of institutional child sexual abuse demonstrated sexual grooming behaviour, including the introduction of sexualised conversations online, non-sexual touching, gift giving and befriending families of sexually abused children.
- These individuals were often perceived positively by institutions and communities – presenting as charismatic individuals, which facilitated the building of a trusting relationship with the community, institution, children and children’s families.
- In some cases, both the alleged perpetrators and victims discussed how, at the time, they believed that they were in romantic relationships with each other. Adolescents who believed that they were in a relationship with the alleged perpetrator did not recognise the abusive nature of these interactions at the time. Outsiders also did not report or detect the child sexual abuse, often conflating it as a consensual relationship.
- Much of the child sexual abuse seen in the case files took place outside of the institution (for example, in cars, hotels or the houses of alleged perpetrators and victims) as well as or in addition to online, creating private spaces, which was likely to reduce the risk of detection.
- Alleged perpetrators discussed pre-existing health conditions and situational factors, and claimed these acted to blur their judgement with regard to perpetrating child sexual abuse (for example, mental health conditions, marital breakdowns and financial worries).
- Alleged perpetrators described a level of confusion and lack of understanding of the rules around children over the age of 16, and a lack of clarity over ‘positions of trust’.

4.1 Characteristics of alleged perpetrators

4.1.1 Age

The 43 barred individuals in the sample were aged between 17 and 60 at the time of the child sexual abuse, although most were in their twenties or thirties at the time the offence took place, and principally under 35. The barred individuals in this sample were slightly younger than other studies have found (see Moulden et al., 2007; 2010), although research suggests that female perpetrators within institutions may have an earlier onset of offending behaviour than male perpetrators within institutions (see Darling et al., 2018).

Across the whole sample of 43 cases, most barred individuals were under 30 at the time of the offence, hence the age gap between alleged perpetrators and victims was smaller. Only one barred individual was in their sixties and none of the barred individuals in the sample were in their fifties at the time of the child sexual abuse.

There were five barred individuals who were aged 18 to 19 at the time of the allegation of child sexual abuse within an institutional context. One other individual was 17 at the time of the offence. Of these six cases, four barred individuals were male and two were female; the sexually abused children were mostly female. The youngest child sexually abused by a barred individual under the age of 20 was an 11-year-old child, and the oldest was 17, but most sexually abused children within this cohort were 13 or 14 years old.

In cases involving barred individuals under the age of 20, the small age gap between barred individuals and sexually abused children meant that the former were more likely to be described in case files (by themselves, children and others) as peers. This was especially so in cases involving players and coaches in sports contexts. Smith and Freyd (2014) commented that the role of 'sports coach' is often associated with an expected level of closeness to players and this may have also played a role in 'blurring the lines'.

4.1.2 Employment history of alleged perpetrators (including volunteer experience)

The employment history of alleged perpetrators tended to fit into one of three categories:

- a long history working within the sector;
- new to the sector; or
- holding multiple (but generally related) jobs.

Most alleged perpetrators had worked in their field for several years, either as a paid employee or as a volunteer in the sector. This meant that they held considerable expertise and authority within the institution and were generally well known and regarded by peers. In many cases, the individual had a substantial history of working within the sector despite being relatively young themselves. This also included circumstances where the individual had been a player at a club and then progressed into a coaching role.

There were only four cases in which alleged perpetrators had previously worked in different sectors than those pertaining to the discretionary referrals (Sectors: education; foster care and social care), representing a minority of the sample.

Some individuals held multiple, but related, jobs at the time of the offence. This was common in the sports and leisure sector, where the individual may have been working for a club while also offering private coaching and operating as a self-employed worker. A few had recently joined the sector from another industry. Two foster carers also held other jobs, however these secondary jobs were unrelated to their positions as carers. In both these cases, the second jobs could be seen to somewhat ‘facilitate’ the child sexual abuse.

- For example, one worked in IT and hacked into the child’s social media and phone to continue to exert control over her after she had been removed from his care.
- The second worked within the local authority, in a position of social standing and power, which may have been a barrier to disclosure if the child felt less likely to be believed (although this is not explicitly articulated in the file).

This barrier is a common finding in other research (see Brown et al., 2020; Zammit et al., 2020; Darling et al., 2020a; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017, Volume 4; Hurcombe et al., 2019). Furthermore, Kaufman et al. (2016) pointed out that a unique feature that distinguishes perpetrators within institutional contexts is the imbalance of power between institutional offenders and victims.

Previous research (for example, Christensen and Darling, 2020) found that most perpetrators in institutions were in the mid-to-senior stages of their careers. The current sample demonstrated that individuals who were established within their sectors were well known and, possibly, well-regarded within institutions. An individual’s social status or reputation within an institution therefore may have been an enabling factor in allowing child sexual abuse to occur undetected. This positional power and time ‘in service’ also served as a barrier in deterring children from making disclosures, out of fear of not being believed.

4.1.3 Perceptions of alleged perpetrators

There were a number of cases where the alleged perpetrators were explicitly described by colleagues or others favourably. This was pronounced in cases where the person was perceived to be a renowned individual within their field, or where they had been a long-standing member of the community or institution (Sectors: faith; and voluntary and community).

- For example, in one case the reference from a previous headmaster described the alleged perpetrator as “*a talented and immensely likeable man*” (Sector: education).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator had received awards and a series of pay rises in recognition of his teaching performance (Sector: education). The file also included a letter of thanks, from the headteacher, praising the individual for the excellent work he was doing and remarking on his value within the community.

The term ‘integrity manipulation’ has been used in previous work to describe a strategy in which perpetrators deliberately present as a person of integrity and which also allows denial to occur following allegations (Sullivan and Quayle, 2012). In the current study, some alleged perpetrators deliberately took on extra roles and responsibilities and applied for pastoral roles in addition to their existing roles, which added to their favourable perception.

In a small number of cases, alleged perpetrators had built trusting relationships with the children's family members. This related to cases where witnesses and colleagues described feeling "shocked" when allegations came to light, suggesting this was out of character for the named individual (Sector: sports and leisure). Females in the sample were more often described positively by colleagues and others within the case files than males. For example, in one case, a female teacher was described as a valued teacher, someone who was "reflective" and "honest" (Sector: education). In this case, the teacher had also been praised by the child's father for her commitment and support to the child in her role as form tutor.

The finding that alleged perpetrators were well regarded by colleagues and community members is reflected in perpetrator typologies (see Erooga et al., 2012). 'Charismatic' perpetrators often do things outside of and in addition to their normal duties. Compared to perpetrators of child sexual offences outside of institutions, institutional perpetrators seem to be more socially competent and therefore were more likely to be well perceived (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 2).

However, not all alleged perpetrators in the case files had positive reputations and, at times, favourable perceptions or accolades were nestled alongside rumours and previous concerns.

- For example, in one case, an individual had earned a pejorative 'nickname' among those in the youth group, linked to previous allegations of inappropriate behaviour (see section 5.1.2 on concerns about professionalism, knowledge of previous incidents and low-level concerns). In this case, a witness noted: "It was well known by everyone what [alleged perpetrator] was doing" (Sector: voluntary and community).

A small number of cases documented that the alleged perpetrator was considered "creepy", a "little weird", or a "bit of a predator" by children and young people (Sectors: education and voluntary and community).

- For example, in one case a witness described the alleged perpetrator:

"I knew him when I was in the [youth group] and have always found him to be a little weird. If we had banter, and it went too far, the [alleged perpetrator] would always take it further." (Sector: voluntary and community)

Sometimes these observations were not reported or acted upon.

- For example, information from a risk assessment stated:

"A ... girl banged her hand ... [alleged perpetrator] said 'I know why your hand hurts it's because you have been wanking your boyfriend off too much'. The girl was disgusted and told her friend. They agreed he was just a 'creep'." (Sector: sports and leisure)

In these cases this information was shared explicitly with the institution, through witness interviews and statements, during the investigation period following allegations being made rather than at the time it occurred.

4.1.4 Pre-existing physical and mental health conditions of alleged perpetrators

There were 14 cases where the alleged perpetrator said they had pre-existing conditions, which they described as vulnerabilities, and used to explain their offending (including four cases involving females). The most commonly cited condition was depression and some case files recorded that alleged perpetrators were diagnosed as clinically depressed, prior to the allegations.

- For example, an individual from the voluntary and community sector had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Additionally, alleged perpetrators across the sample were noted as experiencing other conditions, such as anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism. Where individuals had pre-existing physical health conditions, some used this as evidence to try and disprove and deny the allegations once they had been made.

- For example, in a childcare case, the individual concerned said he could not get sexually aroused due to medication, which he claimed undermined the allegation involving him getting an erection when playing with a child.

Females had co-occurring vulnerabilities and more complex mental health issues than males in the sample. A high prevalence of mental health needs has been seen in general populations of female perpetrators elsewhere (for example, Parsons et al., 2010, who looked generally at female prisoners on remand, not just those who sexually abused children).

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017; Volume 2) also noted the prevalence of pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as anxiety and depression, drug and alcohol use at the time of the offence, and changing personal circumstances among offenders (male and female). Their work drew on research and case studies, and accounts from 6,875 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts in Australia.

4.1.5 Personal and situational factors for alleged perpetrators at the time of child sexual abuse

This theme focuses on the alleged perpetrators' life circumstances at the time of the offence. This is different from the previous section as it focuses more on situational factors occurring at the time of the sexual abuse rather than pre-existing health conditions that pre-dated the abuse.

There were eight cases which detailed adverse situational factors occurring in the life of the alleged perpetrator at the time when they sexually abused a child. Where issues were raised, associated with health or relationships, individuals often suggested this made them 'vulnerable' to poor decision making, or what they perceived to be advances from children.

- For example, one alleged perpetrator noted his fiancé had just left him and another described her emotional and mental state at the time of the offence as a "mess" (Sectors: education and voluntary and community).

Previous work has found high levels of reported life stress, mental health problems or a change in life circumstances at the time of perpetrators committing child sexual abuse (for example, Erooga et al., 2012). A more recent study which looked at institutional sexual abuse (of vulnerable adults) concluded that life stressors and personally stressful situations were associated with a higher risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse (Kamavarapu et al., 2017). However, Romito (2008) discusses that some perpetrators will use the technique of ‘psychologising’ which involves referring to psychological or biological conditions to explain the cause of their offending behaviour. This often results in therapeutic rather than criminal outcomes.

4.1.6 Marital status

Some alleged perpetrators had a settled family life and did not describe challenging relationship circumstances. There were 14 cases where the alleged perpetrator was married or in a relationship at the time of the child sexual abuse.

- For example, one alleged perpetrator openly told the sexually abused child that she had a girlfriend who she “loved” (Sector: voluntary and community).
- In four cases, the alleged perpetrators explicitly described marital problems at the time of the child sexual abuse as well as or in addition to separating after the investigation.

The fact that some alleged perpetrators were married or in relationships meant that witnesses, colleagues and peers found it hard to believe they were also sexually abusing children.

- For example, one alleged perpetrator was described as having “*the perfect family*” (Sector: education).

Therefore, where those accused were in seemingly happy, stable and long-term relationships with families, this may have contributed to their perceived trustworthiness and positive social standing. These individuals may have appeared as less of a risk to outsiders (see section 4.1.3 on perceptions of alleged perpetrators).

Alleged perpetrators who were married or in relationships, and involved in ongoing abusive relationships with children, could be seen to be living something of a double life. In most of these cases, children were aware that the alleged perpetrator was married or in a relationship, but the alleged perpetrator’s partner did not know of the child sexual abuse and infidelity. In some cases, the child sexual abuse was not a one-off occurrence and included sexual grooming behaviour over months or years. This would have involved a significant degree of concealment. In two foster care cases, the child sexual abuse was taking place in the family foster home. This afforded ongoing and regular contact with children but in spaces where the families of the alleged perpetrators also resided. Offending behaviour therefore tended to occur at night, when their partners were asleep or out.

Other research findings indicate a similar amount of variability in the relationship status of perpetrators at the time of the child sexual abuse (Leclerc et al., 2015; Erooga et al., 2012; Moulden et al., 2007; 2010).

4.1.7 Positions of trust

A number of alleged perpetrators in this research sample worked in roles that were defined as positions of trust by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (such as teachers who sexually abused their pupils). However, some alleged perpetrators were in roles and positions that fell outside of legal definitions of positions of trust at the time of the sexual abuse (see section 1.4.5). This included sports coaches who sexually abused players within the clubs they were working in, and Scout or Guide leaders who sexually abused children within those community groups. There were also examples where there was further 'trust' afforded to individuals who held additional roles and responsibilities. This included being head of department or adopting pastoral duties on top of their day job (often as a result of being perceived favourably by the institution or having worked in the sector for a long time). To this end, not only were people in default positions of trust through their job role, but the additional behaviour and activities they undertook within these roles served to make them appear more trustworthy and trusted by peers, children and families. Some were also acting 'in loco parentis' through foster care or residential schools.

As discussed in section 4.1.3, alleged perpetrators' social standing within communities or institutions, or their reputations as 'experts' in their field, afforded a lot of trust and institutional protection. Often, within these roles, individuals were afforded high levels of access to children and had caring and pastoral responsibilities. This was also found in other work with perpetrators of institutional child sexual abuse, which noted that at times this nurturing role was actively sought by perpetrators for the reasons above (Colton et al., 2010).

Furthermore, in cases where alleged perpetrators held multiple roles within an institution, with their remit and responsibilities expanding over time, this may have been accompanied by a greater level of trust and authority. This has been remarked upon in previous work which reflected that inappropriate relationships were often established through these additional roles, such as pastoral positions or key worker roles (Darling and Hackett, 2020). In the current research, this was especially pronounced in cases where the alleged perpetrator had 'sole' responsibility for the care of a child, for example in foster care cases or residential schools where they were acting as a responsible guardian. In foster care cases, the level of scrutiny and monitoring by the local authority and other staff and colleagues was less consistent and more sporadic than in other institutional contexts.

4.2 Characteristics of sexually abused children

This section sets out how alleged perpetrators preyed on, and targeted, vulnerable or particularly talented children over whom they could exert their 'expert' power and control, through special care and attention. In some cases this involved the alleged perpetrator being an assigned key worker to the child which meant they spent considerable one-to-one time together, building trust and rapport. This provided opportunities for sexual grooming. The age of sexually abused children in the sample, when the abuse began, ranged from a few months old to 17 years. In eight of the case files, children were pre-pubescent. In 29 case files, the children were between 15 and 17 years old.

4.2.1 Vulnerabilities of sexually abused children

One quarter of cases included children who had particular vulnerabilities (over and above being a child), which the alleged perpetrators exploited. Children in foster care were noted as being especially vulnerable and some had had experiences, pre-dating the abuse, which made them even more vulnerable (eg previous abuse). The history and presenting needs of children in care varied.

- For example, one child was noted as having prolific bed wetting, a cognitive age lower than her chronological age and a significant history of trauma and neglect.
- Other children in care were described as “feral” and “wild” by the alleged perpetrator, unable to use cutlery when they arrived (Sector: foster care).
- In one education case, a child who alleged to have been sexually abused by his teacher had a history of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- Another child had special learning needs and had been allocated a key worker (the alleged perpetrator) to assist with this.
- In three other cases, the children had a history of self-harm, and one harmed in front of the alleged perpetrator.
- Two case files also noted that the children had low self-esteem.

Alleged perpetrators made efforts to capitalise on these vulnerabilities by giving children with low self-esteem extra attention (Sectors: education and sports and leisure).

In two cases, the children were known to youth offending services (Sectors: education and social care). In a social care case, the child was under the care of the alleged perpetrator in a residential home and disclosed that in the past she had been sexually assaulted and raped by a sibling. Although there was little detail on the frequency of this in the case file samples, findings in previous Inquiry work indicates that children who experienced sexual abuse are likely to be re-victimised in the future (Fisher et al., 2017).

The case files showed examples where alleged perpetrators targeted specific children and took advantage of their additional vulnerabilities to get closer to them, offering children in distress a ‘shoulder to cry on’ or extra support. In some cases this ‘targeting’ was in environments where other children, who did not have additional vulnerabilities, were present, which suggested a deliberate ‘choosing’ of vulnerable children. However, in cases such as foster care or residential care, there were other children with vulnerabilities who were, seemingly, not targeted or known to have been sexually abused in these case files. Previous work also found that perpetrators identified and manipulated children’s vulnerabilities to sexually abuse children (Darling et al., 2018; Erooga et al., 2012).

4.2.2 Alleged perpetrators targeted gifted and talented children

There were two examples, from the education sector, whereby alleged perpetrators approached children who they considered to be gifted and talented students. They spent more time with these children, under the guise of nurturing their talents.

- In one case, the child was noted to be a gifted student and the alleged perpetrator was the head of the department (Sector: education).

- In another case, the child was a gifted musician and the alleged perpetrator singled this child out. In this case, the alleged perpetrator and victim were also from the same cultural background. The case file noted that this was an important factor used to seek common ground. During the investigation, the alleged perpetrator stated she had always been so focused on her career she had never fully experienced many previous relationships. She felt the relationship with the child was “real” and asserted that they were “in love” (Sector: education).

Other research found similar findings relating to perpetrators ‘bonding’ with victims over common interests (Roberts et al., 2020; Erooga et al., 2012).

4.3 Nature of the child sexual abuse

This section describes the nature of the child sexual abuse, including the type of sexual abuse, how it commenced, evolved and ended; and where and when it took place.

4.3.1 Non-contact and contact child sexual abuse

It is important to note the breadth of offences that fall under the umbrella of discretionary cases. The case files included a range of child sexual abuse, including contact and non-contact offending. Non-contact child sexual abuse included incidents which were largely centred around the exchange of inappropriate messages online, sexual grooming and the exchange of indecent messages. Non-contact methods were used to ask children “*what they liked*” and to introduce sexual concepts.

- For example, a volunteer instructor at a youth group asked children what “*their favourite sexual position was*” over text messages (Sector: voluntary and community).

Some cases were confined to non-contact offences (for example, one case in the education sector involved photographs of pupils being taken). Other cases included both non-contact offences and contact offences, with a progression from non-contact to contact.

- For example, a sports coach began messaging the young person on Snapchat, before moving to video calling, sending explicit images and rape (Sector: sports and leisure).

Literature on child sexual abuse reports that perpetrators will typically build trust with a child through (online and offline) communication and by slowly increasing the amount of physical touching, to normalise these physical interactions before moving on to initiate sexual contact (Gallagher, 2000; Kaufman et al., 2016).

Contact offending ranged from hugging and kissing children, to sexual touching and, in some cases, rape. Eighteen cases included penetration (this includes six cases of digital penetration). Most cases involved multiple incidents of sexual abuse over a prolonged period of time, making it difficult to quantify the number of incidents of abuse. However, some cases, such as one which involved a sports club coach, involved a discrete number of penetrative acts (three occasions) or a one-off event (for example, between a teacher and pupil after a school event). Other cases, such as a foster care case, involved rape committed over a period of two to three years.

4.3.2 Timing

Not all case files included information about the timing of the sexual abuse, especially in cases involving prolonged child sexual abuse over many years. However, where detailed, the timing of the child sexual abuse was linked to the location and context in which it took place.

- For example, in cases where the children were sexually abused in a hotel or private home, it often took place overnight.
- Eleven case files recorded that the child sexual abuse took place at night. Alleged perpetrators may have chosen to sexually abuse children at night to evade detection.
- In one foster care case, a child was sexually abused during a night-time routine (eg showering or preparing for bed in the bathroom), when getting out of bed for a drink or when the other care-giver/foster carer was in bed.
- In other cases, overnight stays had deliberately been orchestrated, either on school trips or when alleged perpetrators or victims were home alone. In one case, a child went to the alleged perpetrator's flat after a school prom.

In cases where the child sexual abuse was committed within an institution, it often took place during the day. This is consistent with previous research examining contextual and temporal features of child sexual abuse. Research indicates that physical incidents of child sexual abuse are most likely to occur "*against children to whom perpetrators have routine access, in contexts and during times where the perpetrators and victims are most likely to be interacting with each other in the milieu of their usual routines and activities*" (McKillop et al., 2015:6). Offences that were committed online were able to occur during the day or night, although evening was particularly common for this medium.

4.3.3 Location

Case files indicated that child sexual abuse took place in a range of locations. Alleged perpetrators commonly chose private and unsupervised spaces in which to isolate children. Some case files indicated that the child sexual abuse occurred within an institution (for example, in schools) or sites external to institutions (such as in cars and public swimming baths). Some cases did not involve a clear location, as they involved the exchange of messages or images online or by phone (although these interactions sometimes took place while the child or alleged perpetrator were attending institutions, such as the exchange of emails during class time). In foster care cases, the family home served as both the institutional context and the alleged perpetrators and victims' home. This meant children were unable to 'leave' the physical premises of the institution in the same way as they could with, for example, a sports club or school setting.

Over half of the cases featured child sexual abuse that took place outside of the institutional premises. Alleged perpetrators may have chosen external locations to seek out private or unmonitored spaces to avoid detection. The use of external locations reflects research findings from previous studies (Darling et al., 2018; Darling and Hackett, 2020). Previous research has found that child sexual abuse often occurs away from institutions (Moulden et al., 2010). Some episodes of sexual abuse may have been committed external to an institutional premises, but still 'on site', for example in cases where child sexual abuse was perpetrated in a car, within a church carpark. As noted above, key to the choice

of location was the level of privacy afforded. Therefore, where incidents occurred within institutions, alleged perpetrators sought out private spaces, for example a 'score' box in a sports context or an empty classroom.

The paragraphs below describe in more detail the common locations where children were sexually abused.

Toilets and changing rooms

Several cases illustrated that toilets and changing rooms were chosen as opportunistic locations that afforded privacy and access to children, including opportunities for voyeurism. Across the sample, the child sexual abuse that took place in bathroom settings ranged from taking photos to contact sexual offences, such as kissing and rape.

- In one education case, the alleged perpetrator took photos of children in school bathroom cubicles.
- One child, sexually abused by her foster carer, noted that the sexual abuse often took place in the shower and bathroom, as it offered privacy from other family members in the house. The child described in a victim statement: *"Within two minutes of being in the shower he's come in and open the curtain and tell me to wash down below while he masturbated ... I didn't realise it was wrong I just thought he was trying to help me"* (Sector: foster care).
- In another case, a sports coach isolated children in the changing room facilities at the sports club.
- One foster carer sexually abused a child in a changing room at a holiday park, under the guise of 'helping' the child to get changed to go swimming. The child reported that this was one of the first times that inappropriate touching had occurred and the child sexual abuse progressed from there.
- An alleged perpetrator within a church also used changing rooms and shower facilities at a private sports club as one of many locations to sexually abuse children.

These findings are also reflected in the Inquiry's [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports](#).

Cars

A number of cases indicated that child sexual abuse was committed in cars. Cars gave an opportunity to offend because they served as private and unmonitored spaces to isolate children. Alleged perpetrators sometimes chose to park at or drive to especially remote locations, to further avoid detection. They offered 'lifts' to children to orchestrate opportunities for child sexual abuse. Giving 'lifts' to children was also linked to sexual grooming strategies, as this created opportunities to socialise with children and appear to be helpful to family members, without the safeguards afforded by institutions.

The quote below is an extract from an institutional investigation, made by a National Safeguarding Advisor:

"[Child] says that [alleged perpetrator] sent him a number of persuasive messages about meeting up and he felt under pressure to do so ... rather than heading somewhere public it was [alleged perpetrator's] idea to drive [child] to a cafe in a park ... [alleged perpetrator] and [child] ended up sitting alone in [alleged perpetrator's] car. [Child] reported that [alleged perpetrator] ran his hands over his body, over and under his clothing." (Sector: faith)

The National Safeguarding Advisor went on to understate the severity of the alleged child sexual abuse "... my assessment of the situation is that it was extremely unwise for [alleged perpetrator] to sit alone in a car with a child, hugging and kissing them ..." (Sector: faith).

The use of cars has been noted elsewhere in the literature on child sexual abuse but to a much lesser extent (Brown et al., 2020; Moulden et al., 2010), although more recent research looking at female perpetrators found a third of cases involved cars (Darling and Hackett, 2020).

Family homes

In addition to the foster care cases, 15 other cases (across a range of institutional contexts) described how alleged perpetrators chose to perpetrate child sexual abuse in their own homes or the homes of children.

- In one case, the alleged perpetrator claimed that a teenage child engaged in oral sex in the bathroom of the child's home. He had been invited to the child's house as a guest at a family barbecue.

Trips away from institutional premises

Case files detailed how school or camping trips were used as opportunities to offend. Trips away from institutional premises permitted a level of informality, providing opportunities to engage with children through social activities. Overnight school trips created new opportunities for social and prolonged contact with children. School trips also offered a greater level of authority and trust over children, as alleged perpetrators assumed the roles of acting 'in loco parentis'. Where child sexual abuse occurred on overnight school trips, the sexual abuse took place in alleged perpetrators' or victims' hotel rooms. Alleged perpetrators took advantage of these private spaces to isolate children. Similar findings were reported in the Inquiry's Truth Project Thematic Report: [Child sexual abuse in the context of schools](#).

The use of hotels as a site for child sexual abuse was cited in three cases which occurred in the context of school trips.

One case was covered by two separate files, one for the direct alleged perpetrator and one for a second alleged perpetrator (a colleague) involved in facilitating the child sexual abuse. This case related to an allegation of a young person being sexually abused in a house or hotel after they had been taken out of residential school overnight. An extract from Local Authority Designated Officer²⁰ meeting notes stated:

²⁰ All local authorities are required to have a Local Authority Designated Officer as set out in the HMG guidance on [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (2018). Local Authority Designated Officers provide advice and guidance regarding concerns about an individual's inappropriate behaviour when working with children and young people.

“The victim was initially very embarrassed and shy when he was spoken to, but later confirmed they were having sexual relations and at times she had taken him to a hotel ... and also bought him substances.” (Sector: social care)

The statement below from a sports and leisure case was made by the alleged perpetrator:

“We had confessed to falling in love with each other ... I had booked the hotel the night before after consuming a large amount of alcohol ... we wanted to be somewhere, where we didn't have to worry and where we could just totally be ourselves.” (Sector: sports and leisure)

4.4 Perpetrators' strategies for offending

4.4.1 Gradual sexual grooming and building trust

Sexual grooming is a highly prevalent feature of institutional child sexual abuse (for example, see Darling and Hackett, 2020; Green, 2001). Case files indicated significant episodes of sexual grooming, as described by sexual grooming models (Winters et al., 2020). In some cases, alleged perpetrators and victims knew each other through their contact within institutions for a considerable time before the child sexual abuse began. Sexual grooming was often a gradual and methodical process involving building trusting relationships with children, as has been seen in other research (Kaufman et al., 2016; Leclerc et al., 2005). The sexual grooming techniques documented in the case files, such as sending gifts, cards, offering a 'shoulder to cry on', giving hugs and special attention, and befriending family members, allowed alleged perpetrators to build a relationship of trust and emotional connection with children, normalising sexual contact and making children feel dependent on them.

The parent of a sexually abused child stated:

“I have no doubt in my mind that [alleged perpetrator] was a sexual predator who groomed my son for a two year period. Fact.” (Sector: education)

4.4.2 Befriending families

There was evidence in the case files where the alleged perpetrator befriended the child's family.

- In six cases, parents knew that the alleged perpetrators were spending time with their children, but this was not treated with suspicion because the individual had established trusting relationships with the family and were viewed favourably by them.
- In one case, the family knew that the alleged perpetrator would collect the child from the family home to spend time together; in another case, the alleged perpetrator was invited to the family home for tea and social events (Sectors: sports and leisure and education).

Minutes from a safeguarding meeting provide another example of grooming children and their families:

“... [Alleged perpetrator] took her to college every day and was paid petrol money for this, her mum is believed to have been aware of these activities. There is a possibility that they [alleged perpetrator and victim] may have been in a relationship. Both the young girl and her mother are reported to have mental health issues and could be considered as vulnerable.” (Sector: voluntary and community)

There are studies which suggest that perpetrators purposefully target individuals with parents who are absent or under greater financial burdens, or those with a lack of support, such as single parents (Smith and Freyd, 2014; Colton et al., 2010). In the cases analysed for this study, there was evidence that alleged perpetrators attempted to fill gaps left by parents, such as offering extra support and lifts. There were also cases where they befriended parents and attended social gatherings with family members. They appeared benign and helpful to families and this provided them with a greater level of access and contact with children. It is unclear from the case files the extent that 'befriending' families was deliberate to gain access to children, or if the natural closeness that arose through socialising gave the opportunity for children to be sexually abused.

4.4.3 Gift giving

Alleged perpetrators bought children gifts in eight of the cases. Gift giving may have occurred at the start of sexual grooming, as a way of befriending children.

- For example, in one case, the alleged perpetrator lent a child money (Sector: faith).
- In other cases, alleged perpetrators gave children gifts immediately after episodes of child sexual abuse to silence or placate them. They sent cards to children, with declarations of love and promises of a future together (seen in four cases).

"He [alleged perpetrator] started saying he wanted sex, when they, when he were out, and that he wanted to get married to me and that he wanted to, when his wife died, for me to get with him, and stay with him."
(Sector: foster care)

These cards were emotionally exploitative gestures which served to make children feel special, and were acts that resembled those seen in consensual relationships, masking the abusive nature of the behaviour.

- An excerpt from a letter written to a child illustrates the extent of these coercive grooming strategies:

"My world, my soulmate and my heart's keeper ... I want to be the one person you can share your whole life with ... you are the one I want to see when I walk down the aisle, you're the one I want to call the father of my babies ..." (Sector: social care)

- In another case, a teacher gave a card to a pupil, after they left school:

"I hope you know how much happiness you bring into my life ... I have never met anyone like you ... I would be proud to call you my daughter or even my friend ... I am always here for you and to help you, no matter what ... don't be too sad to say goodbye, only happy because of the memories, these I will cherish forever."
(Sector: education)

- In some cases, children were provided with food and drinks which operated as ‘functional gifts’, less conspicuous than jewellery for example.

“He will just, like, bribe me with either fags or money, just letting me go out, letting me sleep out and just – he’d just bribe me with loads of different stuff to try and make me happy and not tell anyone.” (Sector: foster care)

- Some enticed children with sweets and chocolates to keep them “quiet about everything” (Sector: foster care).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator purchased alcohol for a child on a school trip, and invited her to his hotel room to “make sure she was alright” when she became intoxicated, and sexually abused her (Sector: education).

Other research found that gift giving and special treatment were features of sexual grooming behaviours within institutions, used by perpetrators to induce, exploit, coerce and emotionally blackmail children (Green, 2001; Gallagher, 2000). Institutional perpetrators in Colton’s (2010) sample described that, with each gift given to a victim, they felt they had more power and control over that child and it was harder for victims to disengage or say ‘no’ to the perpetrator.

4.4.4 Special treatment

Eight cases included evidence of children being singled out and given special attention by alleged perpetrators. In some cases this made the child feel uncomfortable, in other cases this grooming tactic was described by children as making them feel special. Some alleged perpetrators manipulated children by offering them learning opportunities or work placements, which afforded them a greater degree of power and control. They also made children feel dependent on them and created opportunities to isolate children through one-to-one contact.

“It is evident that [alleged perpetrator] treated [child] differently from other young people on the project, [alleged perpetrator] stated he considered [child] to be a friend and that he felt closer to him than other young people ... [child] says that he told [alleged perpetrator] personal things.” (Sector: faith)

Several cases illustrated that individuals in positions of trust exhibited favouritism by asking particular children to help them with specific tasks, a tactic that other research has also highlighted, particularly in the contexts of schools and sports (Brown et al., 2020; Darling et al., 2020b). This served to diminish adult–child social hierarchies, levelling out the social roles and creating scenarios where alleged perpetrators and children appeared as peers or colleagues.

4.4.5 Befriending children

Alleged perpetrators also forged trusted relationships with children by befriending them or acting as their peers, dissolving the boundaries between adults in positions of trust and befriending children by appearing non-threatening. In four cases, children described having known the alleged perpetrators over a number of years. Although this may not have been a period of consistent grooming, it contributed to the ways in which they appeared benign rather than sinister. This research finding corresponds with the existing knowledge base about sexual grooming being a gradual process.

As reflected in section 4.1.2 on employment history, alleged perpetrators often had established roles within the institutions they worked in and were likely perceived by children and colleagues as trustworthy.

4.4.6 Non-sexual touching and use of hugs

A common tactic used to befriend children and normalise sexual touching was the use of hugs.

- In one case, the alleged perpetrator hugged a number of children, and also encouraged boys to sit on his lap.

Hugs were described by alleged perpetrators as “good hugs” or “special hugs” (Sector: faith). Hugs were used to initiate and normalise physical contact with children, under the guise of offering support or empathy. Several children described receiving “lengthy hugs” (Sector: faith) which made them feel uncomfortable.

“He [alleged perpetrator] used to give really nice hugs, like when I was upset and stuff, just normal hugs – then he started being really weird about it, he started touching me and that, and then it just kind of progressed from there. It kept getting worse and worse. Then he’d, like, rape me a few times.”
(Sector: foster care)

Another instance of non-sexual touching was illustrated in a faith case by an individual who worked as a mentor.

- The alleged perpetrator used “good hugs” regularly but progressed to touching the child’s groin and manoeuvring the child’s hands to do the same to him. In a text message exchange following a particular abusive incident, the alleged perpetrator was told by the child that he no longer wanted to do “stuff like that”. The alleged perpetrator apologised but still asked if they could have “good hugs sometimes” (Sector: faith).

This research finding links to literature on grooming by perpetrators in institutional contexts, which indicates the introduction of non-sexual touching as a specific and deliberate method and technique (Colton et al., 2010; Erooga et al., 2012; Leclerc et al., 2015), not only to introduce sexual contact but also to ‘test the water’ to see how victims respond to physical contact.

4.4.7 Use of technology and social media

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse stated that “online interaction is now so ubiquitous that it is likely to feature in some form in almost all cases [of child sexual abuse]” (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2020:22). Alleged perpetrators used a range of social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Snapchat, to connect and communicate privately with children. Social media and technology more generally (for example, emails and messaging) were used as a platform for sexual grooming.

- For example, in one case the alleged perpetrator befriended the child by engaging in online gaming before progressing to contact offending. Eight cases made reference to alleged perpetrators using Snapchat to send sexually explicit and indecent images (Sector: education).

Social media and the internet offered the opportunity for unsupervised and regular contact with children.

- In one case, it was reported that the alleged perpetrator exchanged up to 65 emails and 120 messages a day with a child. The individual had also set up a dedicated private email account for the sole purpose of communicating with the child (Sector: education). Another case recorded 6,000 pages of text message exchanges between the alleged perpetrator and victim.
- In one case, the alleged perpetrator established an abusive relationship with a child entirely through social media contact (Sector: voluntary and community).

The use of text messages illustrated how some alleged perpetrators ‘love bombed’²¹ children (Hayes and Jeffries, 2016). Webcam or video calls were used in four cases and involved sexually exploiting children by asking them to perform sexual acts or to reveal their bodies on camera. Online platforms enabled alleged perpetrators to progress grooming tactics from non-sexual chat, to sexual chat, to the sharing of images and videos.

4.4.8 Evading detection

Alleged perpetrators used a range of methods to conceal the child sexual abuse or evade detection. These methods formed part of the complex web of sexual grooming strategies. These sexually exploitative behaviours ranged from threatening, blackmailing or intimidating children to deterring them from disclosing the child sexual abuse (see section 5.3 on disclosures). By spending time building trusted relationships with children, alleged perpetrators exerted power, control and authority. Where sexual abuse took place in person, private spaces were chosen to evade detection (this is discussed in section 4.3.3).

In some cases, alleged perpetrators explicitly manipulated and coached children into lying about where they were and who they were with to conceal the child sexual abuse.

- For example, one individual sent the following text message to a young person: “*Remember if I come today. No hugging. Just ‘Hi’*” and “*Only handshake and hi how are you*” (Sector: education). In this case, the alleged perpetrator would offer excuses for the child to give his mother about why he would be coming home late, or suggest lies for the boy to tell his mother to alleviate suspicions, “*you could pretend your friend called and cancelled then pretend to walk home*” (Sector: education).
- There was one case example where the alleged perpetrator asked the child to lie about her age (Sector: education).
- Another individual, after raping a child in a toilet and causing bleeding, instructed the child to leave the bathroom with a tissue and say she had “*knocked her head*” (Sector: sports and leisure).

21 Love bombing is an attempt to influence a person by persistent demonstrations of attention and affection, often at the early stages of contact, and has historically been used with domestic violence cases but has also been seen in cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Online communication methods were also used to make unsupervised contact with children and to orchestrate child sexual abuse online. Some case files highlighted that alleged perpetrators sometimes used code language to disguise sexualised messages online. This included using emojis or writing cryptic biographies on Snapchat or Instagram that only alleged perpetrators and victims understood. Using social media platforms such as Snapchat was common, as pictures and messages were only accessible for a short period of time before they expired, minimising the risk of detection. Snapchat may have been the social media platform of choice for many alleged perpetrators because one of its key features is that the platform automatically destroys online content,²² as illustrated by the following extract from a risk report:

“... [Alleged perpetrator] used the Snapchat messenger service to send material in the likely knowledge most are not retrievable. This would indicate he had a desire not to be caught.” (Sector: sports and leisure)

4.5 Patterns of offending

This section sets out observations within and across case files relating to patterns of offending, such as the deliberate onset of child sexual abuse (for example, waiting until a child was a certain age or had left the institution) or other patterns of abusive behaviour.

4.5.1 Deliberately waiting until child turns 16, 18 or leaves the institution

There were several cases where the alleged perpetrator deliberately waited until a child turned either 16 or 18 years old before the sexual abuse started, thinking this would mitigate their behaviour. Some made explicit reference to waiting, indicating this was deliberate and considered. This was also raised as a proposed defence by some individuals in response to allegations of child sexual abuse. Other alleged perpetrators chose to sexually abuse children who had left the institution or during holiday periods. These patterns of offending relate to alleged perpetrators' own perceptions of what constituted 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours, reasoning that if children were over the age of 16 or 18, as well as or in addition to no longer attending the same institution in which they worked, this mitigated their actions.

- For example, in one case the alleged perpetrator was working as a teaching assistant and deliberately did not message the child until she was 16. However, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that it is unlawful for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child in their care, even if the child is over 16 years old.
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator was a member of a youth group and stated that the young people who he was involved with included an individual who had left the institution and a volunteer; implying the second victim was a colleague.

22 However, images sent via Snapchat can be kept by the recipient by taking a screenshot or screen 'grab' of the snap.

Legally, the specific positions of trust offences would not be relevant if child sexual abuse took place or started after someone had left the institution. However, if the child was under 16 at the time of the sexual abuse taking place, the perpetrator could be prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which includes a range of sexual offences against children. If the child has turned 18, the abuse of trust offences do not apply and any sexual activity will not constitute a criminal offence unless it takes place without consent. Similarly, for those working in regulated activity, a referral to the DBS can be made if there is a concern that there is a risk to children. In this case the DBS would have to undertake a risk assessment and even if there have been no criminal convictions, a bar can take place (see section 1.4.3 on DBS discretionary referrals). Furthermore, some professions such as social work, education and healthcare have additional regulatory standards which set out professional codes of conduct.

4.5.2 Repeated offending behaviour

In 16 out of the 43 cases the alleged perpetrator sexually abused more than one child. In the majority of these cases, there were similarities in the age and sex of the sexually abused children. In four of the cases, the alleged perpetrators sexually abused multiple children and from a range of ages.

- For example, a sports coach targeted children from 12 to 17 years old.

Where alleged perpetrators sexually abused more than one child, their tactics were consistent, even if they offended in different institutional contexts. For example:

- In one case, the location, nature of the child sexual abuse and victim demographic were consistent (within the same institution). This case involved taking photos under toilet cubicles, of young female pupils (Sector: education).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator sexually abused three children. The nature of the sexual abuse was consistent; the individual inappropriately washed the boys in his care (Sector: voluntary and community).
- In one case, the alleged perpetrator targeted two similar children, both males of similar ages and circumstances, and used similar strategies to sexually groom them (Sector: education).
- In another, although the offences spanned a period of approximately ten years, they occurred within the same institution and were alleged to involve three 17-year-old girls.
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator used a similar modus operandi; she was a coach, who had a relationship with two female players at the club (Sector: sports and leisure).

These cases would suggest that some perpetrators display a similar pattern of offending over time and across victims, and fit into Wortley and Smallbone's (2006) description of an 'opportunistic offender' (see Table 2.1).

4.6 Responses to allegations of child sexual abuse

Some cases included information on the perspectives of the individuals against whom allegations were made, although not all files contained this information. Where the case files did include the alleged perpetrators' views, there was variability in the extent to which they acknowledged that their behaviour was wrong.

In many cases, individuals denied the allegations or constructed a mitigation narrative to justify, explain or minimise the child sexual abuse:

- alleged perpetrators either denied the child sexual abuse at all, saying no contact had occurred; or
- they admitted the contact occurred but denied it was child sexual abuse, using tactics such as victim blaming or describing the sexual abuse as a consensual 'relationship'; or
- they admitted the sexual abuse but minimised their responsibility, for example by claiming that they had made "*mistakes*" or "*poor judgements*", sometimes as a result of ill-health and life stressors (Romito, 2008); or
- some alleged perpetrators disputed that they held 'positions of trust', therefore safeguarding policies did not apply to them and had not been breached.

This can be compared to earlier Inquiry research on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation who were convicted alongside others, where offenders either maintained their innocence or partially accepted their actions with mitigations around consent or victim blaming (Senker et al., 2020). This is also consistent with the literature on perpetrators of violence who often use a strategy of Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender (DARVO) to confuse and silence their victims (Harsey et al., 2017) and specifically child sexual offenders, who typically deny or minimise the sexual abuse when confronted or challenged (Dietz, 2020). Previous literature has also referred to the fact that some perpetrators adopt a 'victim manipulation style' and point to their own 'victim status' (Sullivan and Quayle, 2012). However, it is also interesting to consider work from Maruna and Mann (2006) who have discussed the fact that a lack of responsibility for an offence may not always mean a greater risk of re-offending, and stress the need to consider accountability for future behaviour rather than past behaviour.

4.6.1 How alleged perpetrators explained the offences in relation to their own perceived 'vulnerabilities'

In approximately five cases, the alleged perpetrators referred to their 'vulnerabilities' when justifying the behaviour under scrutiny. For example:

- A foster carer stated she was pursued by the child, when providing interim foster care for him. She stated that the foster child began flirting with her and they eventually had sexual intercourse which continued on a daily basis. She reported that she was flattered by his attention and was vulnerable at the time of the sexual abuse because she had just come out of an emotionally abusive relationship and was a new mother (Sector: foster care).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator said that his own children had recently been diagnosed with learning disabilities and that he believed he also had undiagnosed learning difficulties, including ADHD and autism (Sector: education).

- In a separate case, another alleged perpetrator reported that he was single and lonely, and that he felt that the absence of physical and intimate contact added to his depression (Sector: education).

In these cases, the alleged perpetrators suggested that their perceived vulnerabilities ‘blurred’ their judgement.

4.6.2 Blaming children

Out of the 43 case files, approximately seven cases included explicit evidence of victim blaming strategies to deflect and rationalise allegations. This included examples where the alleged perpetrators insinuated that they were the ones who had been victimised and pursued by the young person (Sectors: education and voluntary and community).

- In one case, the alleged perpetrator said that a pupil was giving him special attention by wearing make-up to class, smiling at him and asking for lots of help. He told the school authority that the pupil would have been on the school’s “*trouble list*” and that she began saying “*I love you*” to him after he helped her in class but thought nothing of it. The alleged perpetrator in this case also said the pupil had taken photos of him in class and added him as a ‘friend’ on social media (Sector: education).
- Similarly, in another case, the alleged perpetrator who worked as a coach stated, as part of his defence, that he had raised previous concerns about the young person’s “*inappropriate behaviour*” to the club’s chairman (Sector: sports and leisure); however, this was “*never acted upon at the time, until it was reported by another person who appears to be anonymous*” (Sector: sports and leisure).
- In a separate sports context, the alleged perpetrator defended his actions by claiming that the girl who he abused was sexually active before he sexually abused her, insinuating that the girl had consented to the sexual behaviour. The case file noted that:

“*[child] had said to him that she had anal sex behind a pub and before that she had a pregnancy scare a couple of weeks ago. Due to this he assumed that she was sexually active.*” (Sector: sports and leisure)

A small number of individuals questioned the motives behind the allegations against them. They implied that these allegations were vindictive or driven by revenge, infatuation or jealousy. By questioning the motives behind the allegations made against them, they undermined the credibility of disclosures made by witnesses and children.

- In one case, the alleged perpetrator believed the girl he was coaching “*had a crush on him*” and claimed this is why she made the allegations against him (Sector: sports and leisure).
- In a separate case, the alleged perpetrator denied the offence and said the young person was trying to get money through the false allegations because she was a “*single parent, in and out of prison*” (Sector: foster care).
- In another case, a teacher positioned himself as the victim of the circumstances surrounding the allegations, and suggested there had been a “*conspiracy*” among students against him, which led to students spreading untrue rumours (Sector: education).

- In a further example, the alleged perpetrator stated that children had made up allegations and used their vulnerabilities against them, saying “*this was very common in mental health patients*” (Sector: healthcare). See section 5.4.5 on the challenges that institutions faced in handling concerns and corroborating allegations.

This was pronounced in research from the Inquiry in the Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts where victims’ diagnoses were used against them by perpetrators and healthcare professionals (who victims disclosed to), and they were labelled as ‘crazy’ (Zammit et al., 2020). Work on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation (not in institutions) also found evidence of victim blaming and allegations that victims had ulterior motives (for example, seeking compensation) (Senker et al., 2020). Furthermore, in her overarching framework related to violence against women, Romito (2008) highlights blaming as a particular technique used by perpetrators to shift the focus and responsibility for child sexual abuse from them onto the victim, and others.

4.6.3 Alleged perpetrators claimed a lack of understanding

In some cases, alleged perpetrators claimed a lack of understanding of how or why their actions constituted wrongdoing.

- For example, a sports coach specifically stated that because the young person was 18 at the time of the alleged rape, he had not done anything wrong, as he believed a child became an adult after 16 (Sector: sports and leisure).

Several cases indicated that alleged perpetrators were confused about the legal age of consent and the laws surrounding breaches of positions of trust. Many alleged perpetrators seemed focused on legal definitions around age, failing to consider safeguarding, their position of trust and codes of conduct more broadly. A further complication was the difference between legal definitions of positions of trust and criminal justice thresholds (see section 1.4.5 and Figure 5.2). At the time of the sexual abuse detailed in the case files, sports coaches and religious leaders were not covered by the position of trust legislation.

In one case, the alleged perpetrator stated that the institution’s safeguarding policies discussed safeguarding issues relating to children under the age of 16 but not under the age of 18.

- In this case, the individual felt that the institution’s safeguarding rules were unclear. The excerpt below illustrates the alleged perpetrator’s perspective on age and position of trust:

“I am unequal with my U13s as I am their direct coach. I see them 2–3 times a week and can impact their ‘sporting’ life with the decisions I make. When parents leave their child with me, they hold me directly responsible for their safety and their welfare. HOWEVER, I would not consider myself to be directly responsible for another age group that play on a different night/time. I certainly do not have any authority over an age group that I am not involved in ... I’m also only in my 20s so would not consider the age gap to be of a big margin to my teammates aged 16/17, compared to those I do deem myself in a position of trust to, aged 12.” (Sector: sports and leisure)

Some alleged perpetrators disputed that they were in a position of trust.

- In one case, the individual mitigated his behaviour by saying that the young person was an apprentice at the school he worked at. He therefore thought this meant it was not a breach of trust (even though the girl was 17 at the time) as he viewed her as an employee rather than a pupil (Sector: education). A disciplinary hearing report noted:

“... He [alleged perpetrator] advised that he had only become aware that she was an apprentice at the time when the allegations were made. He explained that she wore a staff lanyard and had access to all staff areas and attended staff events.” (Sector: education)

Despite claiming a lack of understanding about position of trust rules, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 clearly states it is unlawful for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child in their care, even if the child is 16 years old and above the age of consent, and even where the child sexual abuse was deemed by the police not to cross the criminal threshold. Previous work has highlighted the fact that institutions may make erroneous implicit assumptions that through reading policies and procedures, individuals had a sufficient understanding of safeguarding approaches (Erooga et al., 2012). The research findings noted above highlight the need for institutions to check understanding in light of the fact that the alleged perpetrators used ‘lack of understanding’ as a mitigation for their behaviour.

4.7 Beliefs and voices of sexually abused children and the impacts of the child sexual abuse

Case files generally contained more information about alleged perpetrators than about the children involved in these cases. Where possible, the voices and beliefs of sexually abused children were considered in order to understand the impact of the child sexual abuse on them and their perspectives.

4.7.1 The concept of consensual relationships

In approximately one third of cases, the alleged perpetrator or victim reported that they were in consensual relationships at the time that the child sexual abuse took place. All these cases involved young people over the age of 16.

- In one case, the young person initially denied he had been associated with a female teacher. However, he later reported that he was a *“willing and active”* participant in the events that occurred with the teacher involved and that at the time *“his friends said they were happy for him and thought it was bonza”*²³ (Sector: education). The child did not support a prosecution. Therefore, although the allegations were denied to authorities, the young person’s friends seemed to have been aware of the alleged perpetrator.

²³ This means ‘excellent’ or ‘first rate’.

This relates to work from Kaufman et al. (2016:40) that stated that “boys sexually abused by women may not report the offences ... due to the broad societal perception that, for a male, any sexual contact with a female would be welcome”.

In some cases, children were seen to send affectionate responses to the messages received from alleged perpetrators, and described that they believed they were in romantic and loving relationships.

- The voluntary and community sector included an example involving an exchange of Facebook messages whereby the young person repeatedly stated she was in love with the alleged perpetrator and wanted a future together. She sent the following text message:

“I knew I wanted you from near enough the very first day of meeting you, the first time I saw you I fancied you so bad ... even then I knew I had no control over anything. Every time I saw you I fancied you more and more ... I am in love with every tiny thing about you...” (Sector: sports and leisure)

- In the case of a teacher and pupil, a girl reflected that at the time she thought the relationship was consensual, but in hindsight she stated in a victim statement:

“I genuinely thought [alleged perpetrator] cared for me and loved me, but now that I look back I doubt this has ever been the case. I also believe he made things easy for things to develop and has lied to me all through this, I doubt I ever would have made moves to progress this on my own and I feel I followed the perpetrator’s lead in all of this.” (Sector: education)

- In a separate case, the sexually abused child stated he consented to having sex and did not wish to make a police statement. His mother told the investigating officer that she did not think what had happened was an offence (even though the alleged perpetrator was previously the child’s assigned one-to-one support worker) (Sector: education).
- Another case involved several victims, one of whom went on to become the alleged perpetrator’s wife (Sector: faith).
- Two further cases indicated that the victim wanted the perceived relationship with the alleged perpetrator to continue.
- Files also included examples where the alleged perpetrator, and not just the victim, described the abusive relationship as “romantic and real” (Sector: education), by way of minimising their behaviour as non-abusive.

Cards written between alleged perpetrators and victims included declarations of love and affection. Some alleged perpetrators discussed future plans with young people, including marriage and children (see section 4.4.3 on gift giving).

This research finding, where either the alleged perpetrator or victim described their contact as something which resembled a consensual relationship, has been cited elsewhere. Wolak et al. (2004), in their work on child sexual abuse that began online, discuss ‘compliant’ or ‘statutory’ victims, referring to victims who “*may actively cooperate with offenders and develop strong sexual and emotional attachments to them. These youths may not see themselves as victims and may resist cooperating with investigators*” (p. 433). Further, in their typology of female perpetrators, Matthews et al. (1991) described a ‘teacher-lover offender’, who initially targeted adolescents and viewed themselves as romantically involved or in love with the victim. However, in the current sample this was seen across both male and female alleged perpetrators and not just related to the education sector. There are important implications for this narrative, as such behaviours may also prevent peers or colleagues from considering the relationship, contact or communication as abusive and they therefore abstain from reporting it or intervening. See section 1.4.6 for a further explanation of perceived relationships.

4.7.2 Children’s strategies to avoid alleged perpetrators or stop the sexual abuse

There were several cases where children actively rejected the advances of alleged perpetrators and other cases where children explained that they did not know how to stop the sexual abuse.

- One child ended contact with the alleged perpetrator by saying that she only kept the messages from him to show them to her teacher. She described them as “*pervy*” and “*inappropriate*”, and told the alleged perpetrator not to contact her again and to “*fuck off*” (Sector: education).
- The social media exchanges between an alleged perpetrator and victim revealed that the child was cautious and wary so as not to solicit further conversation. The alleged perpetrator said “*I need to feel loved*” and “*I need the real thing*”, she replied “*sorry I can’t give you that*” (Sector: voluntary and community).
- In another case the child stated that she had tried to “*bat away*” the alleged perpetrator and had not given him her address (despite him appearing outside her house), she tried to ignore him and pretended it was not happening. She then told a friend and they decided to speak to a senior officer in the youth club to report it. In a victim statement, she reported “*at no point did I want contact like this, initially I thought it was just a laugh but it got worse*” (Sector: voluntary and community).
- In one case the young person stated she “*wanted everything to just stop*”. She described feeling pressured, intimidated and controlled by the alleged perpetrator, and described how he would not end the sexual abuse (Sector: sports and leisure).
- The young person in another case reported feeling pressured by conversations with the alleged perpetrator and he would often change the conversation to a ‘neutral topic’. He said that he responded by saying “*I love you*” because he did not know how else to respond. He stated he felt threatened, anxious and scared, and that if he did not follow through with the alleged perpetrator’s requests that he would be “*spammed with messages*” (Sector: education).

These examples demonstrated how child sexual abuse continued, despite children expressing an unwillingness to engage or articulating that they did not consent.

4.7.3 Impacts of the child sexual abuse

Not every case file included explicit reference to the impact of the child sexual abuse on children. However, where this was included, children described a range of short- and long-term physical and mental impacts of the child sexual abuse. In several cases, children sought professional support to deal with these impacts and some were prescribed medication for symptoms of depression and anxiety. Children also expressed feelings of frustration and distress with the investigation processes.

Short-term and immediate impacts

Sexually abused children described feeling fearful around the time the child sexual abuse was occurring. Notably, some reported a “*fear of being found out*”.

- In an education case there was reference to the child being physically sick on a school trip as she was so concerned that others would notice the behaviour of the alleged perpetrator towards her.

Sexually abused children also reported: insomnia; weight loss; disengaging with exams; substance misuse; and having suicidal thoughts or self-harming.

- In one case, the child also reported being bullied by other students in response to the special treatment he used to get from the alleged perpetrator. The child in a different case was reportedly “*taunted*” for being gay, after receiving indecent images from the alleged perpetrator (Sector: education).

These findings relate to work from Green (2001) who identified that boys who had been sexually abused in residential care settings may be reluctant to report such abuse for fear of being assumed to be gay.

Long-term impacts

Cases also referred to sexually abused children having difficulty forming future relationships and exhibiting a lack of trust in others.

“*This incident had a long lasting effect on [child]. It was a few years before he was able to accept a hug from anyone because what the perpetrator did to him had screwed him up.*” (Sector: education)

One individual also noted that he had changed his name to dissociate from his childhood experiences with the alleged perpetrator.

“*I associate my full forename with my childhood and in particular with [alleged perpetrator] and it makes me uncomfortable when people call me it ...*” (Sector: education)

Similar long-term impacts of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors are mirrored in other research, including impacts on mental health and being rejected by their family or community (see Brown et al, 2020; Darling et al., 2020a; 2020b; Rodger et al., 2020; Hurcombe et al., 2019; Fisher et al., 2017; IICSA, 2017).



CHAPTER 5: How institutions and professionals identify, report and respond to risks and allegations of child sexual abuse

This chapter examines institutions' and professionals' awareness, identification and responses to informal concerns (such as gossip and low-level concerns); this is discussed in sections 5.1 to 5.3. In sections 5.4 to 5.6 the chapter describes how formal disclosures, which led to DBS referrals, were made, how institutions and professionals handled investigations and what the consequences of these investigations were. The summary below provides an overview of the main points described in this chapter.

Summary

- Cultures of fear and silence within institutions posed a significant barrier for children and adults seeking to make disclosures, particularly if they felt the alleged perpetrators were being protected, or if they felt threatened by their positional power and reputation.
- Informal social contact between adults and children was normalised across institutional contexts. This prevented staff and children from identifying, reporting and escalating reports of child sexual abuse.
- Institutional apathy meant that institutions and professionals were often slow to respond, missed warning signs, or did not sufficiently investigate low-level or early concerns. Where action was taken, the institutional response was not always serious enough or proportionate to the risk of harm, and in some cases safeguarding recommendations made by local authorities were dismissed.
- Lack of coordination between institutions and agencies, weak vetting processes and poor record keeping allowed individuals to offend multiple times within institutions, or to continue offending across institutional contexts and over long periods of time. In several cases, institutions and professionals conflated sexually abusive relationships with consensual relationships and failed to take safeguarding action.
- Children and witnesses often retracted their reports or statements at the point of criminal investigations. This meant that police investigations lacked evidence, with a high number of cases resulting in police taking no further action.
- Safeguarding policies were not always robust, implemented and upheld at all levels. There were contradictions between social media safeguarding policies and informal institutional cultures in which social media contact between adults and children was normalised.

5.1 Institutional awareness prior to formal disclosures

This section explores to what extent institutions and professionals were aware of issues or concerns relating to the alleged perpetrators, prior to receiving a formal disclosure.²⁴ Of the 43 cases, 34 indicated that staff, children, their parents (or a combination) had some level of awareness or concerns relating to the alleged perpetrator's inappropriate behaviour. The concerns were raised before, or at the time of the child sexual abuse, and prior to a formal disclosure being made.

A number of case files cited examples of 'informal'²⁵ awareness or concerns, such as rumours, gossip and observations. In some cases, children attending the institutions, staff or family members of the alleged perpetrators observed distinct changes to their behaviours or appearances prior to a formal allegation of child sexual abuse being made.

5.1.1 Rumours and gossip

Of the 34 cases where there was awareness or concerns about an alleged perpetrator, a common theme was that rumours had surfaced about the alleged perpetrator's inappropriate behaviour before formal disclosures were made to the institutions.

- The rumours did not point to particular events or incidents but to multiple concerns related to different types of inappropriate behaviour. For example, messaging students socially, attending social gatherings with students and buying them alcohol.
- Other rumours flagged more substantial allegations, relating to suspected abusive relationships.
- The extent of the rumours in one case were such that it was noted that "*the entire department knew*" about concerns regarding the alleged perpetrator's behaviour with students leading up to the investigation. This included knowledge of a prior sexually abusive relationship with a student at an institution where he was previously employed (Sector: education).
- In another case, staff did not go on to report or escalate the concerns formally, in order to avoid "*causing a stir*", or because they did not believe the rumours were substantiated (Sector: education).

Where gossip or rumours circulated regarding concerns about an individual's inappropriate behaviour, action was not taken because the concerns were not escalated, or because the behaviour was normalised as part of a broader informal institutional culture. Similar findings were also reported in previous research relating to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, such as Brown et al. (2020) and Darling et al. (2020a and 2020b).

24 'Formal disclosures' refers to disclosures that were made to the institution that led to the DBS referral. An institution may have been informally aware of previous allegations/concerns but may have chosen not to escalate these to the DBS in the past.

25 'Informal awareness' refers to gossip or low-level concerns relating to alleged perpetrators' behaviours and performance at work. Formal and informal disclosures are not technical terms and do not relate to a particular point in time, but to a process.

5.1.2 Concerns about professionalism, knowledge of previous incidents and low-level concerns

In many cases, there were concerns regarding alleged perpetrators' conduct and lack of professionalism at work. This included concerns regarding 'over-familiarity' and 'closeness' with children, such as spending time with children at social venues outside of the institutions, and in some cases, children were invited to attend the alleged perpetrators' private residences during the day or overnight.

Informal social relationships

In several cases, there was an awareness that alleged perpetrators were known to have been communicating with children informally and outside of the context of the institution, often via social media. In one case, it was apparent a week before a disclosure was made that the alleged perpetrator was breaching school rules by spending time in the female staff area and by the girls' toilets in a school with segregated male and female spaces (Sector: education). In some cases, it was noted that colleagues were putting themselves "at risk" by overstepping professional boundaries (Sector: education).

Singling out children

Five cases showed that members of the institutions (staff, children or parents) were aware of alleged perpetrators singling out children and giving them 'special treatment'.

- For example, a colleague was concerned about one teacher spending time alone and "out of view" in his classroom with a student, offering tutoring and pastoral care, which was outside of his remit (Sector: education).
- Other members of staff described feeling "uneasy" about the closeness between a teacher and pupil but did not formally report concerns (Sector: education).
- In another case, the deputy manager of a football club had seen the alleged perpetrator having arguments with a 16-year-old child on "nights out" but this was not reported as it was viewed as two adults in a consensual relationship (Sector: sports and leisure).

Institutional knowledge of previous incidents

A number of cases evidenced that institutions were aware of previous incidents and complaints made by members of staff regarding alleged perpetrators' inappropriate behaviour in institutions where the individual had previously worked. The nature of these previous incidents varied and did not always involve direct links to child sexual abuse, but involved other concerning behaviour such as the use of sexualised language.

- For example, in one case, a kitchen assistant working at a nursery was known to have made sexualised comments to staff, "He's said some silly little things to staff ... I took it as them messing ... Nothing had caused concern" (Sector: childcare).
- In another case, a previous employer provided a positive work reference but highlighted that the alleged perpetrator "has a little to learn about appropriate professional conduct and the maintenance of a professional distance between himself and young teenagers" (Sector: education).

Official awareness of prior inappropriate conduct

In some cases, institutions and professionals had more explicit awareness regarding previous incidents.

- For example, in one case, the Local Authority Designated Officer had alerted the college of the alleged perpetrator's history. This involved several allegations of inappropriate behaviour and child sexual abuse, including one that was picked up by an enhanced DBS check. The college remained prepared to employ the individual on the basis that he had not been convicted and that he "*deserved another opportunity*" (Sector: education).
- In another case, the school knew that a teacher had previously engaged in sexual activity with an 18-year-old student in the summer holidays (the teacher had claimed that she believed the student was no longer on the school roll at the time). She was given a final warning, but this was expunged from her record after two years, and she engaged in similar inappropriate behaviour with a child under her care again two years later (Sector: education).

Other research has reported similar findings that even when there have been clear early warning signs of inappropriate behaviour, senior management failed to take appropriate action (Darling and Hackett, 2020; McKenna et al., 2012).

5.1.3 Observed changes in the behaviours of alleged perpetrators and victims

In seven cases, distinct changes in either the behaviours of alleged perpetrators or victims were observed by others. These observations can also be considered as missed warning signs that flagged potentially concerning behaviours that should have been considered as part of institutional safeguarding and risk assessment measures.

Observed changes in alleged perpetrators' behaviours

Staff reported that those against whom allegations were made appeared stressed, agitated or frustrated in the workplace. In a couple of cases, changes to their physical appearance were noticed by colleagues.

- For example, one female residential care worker was seen wearing a boy's clothes to the residential care home for young people (Sector: social care).
- It was noted in a different case that staff observed that a teacher was being "*bullied*" by members of her class, seemingly because several students knew of the abusive relationship between her and another student (Sector: education).

In some cases, family members observed changes in the alleged perpetrators' behaviours.

- For example, in one case, a husband noticed that his wife (the alleged perpetrator) had often mentioned the student in her school in the two years before she pursued an abusive relationship with the student. He noticed that her behaviour began to change as she was "*acting younger than she was*" and recalled his wife saying, "*I love my little [child's name]*" (Sector: education).

Observed changes in children's behaviours

Four case files captured information regarding observed changes in the behaviours of children.

- In one case, a girl became increasingly rebellious in the lead up to being moved from one foster care home to another. She was behaving “awkwardly” in the alleged perpetrator’s presence, according to his wife (Sector: foster care).
- In one case, the child’s parents noticed that their son was actively avoiding the alleged perpetrator.
- In other cases, children’s peers noticed that they had become more withdrawn.

Previous research highlights the challenges in detecting child sexual abuse and recognising sexual grooming (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 4; McKenna et al., 2012). For example, the Inquiry’s Truth Project Thematic Report: *Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts* found that some children did not make explicit disclosures of child sexual abuse, but did externalise behaviours, and these indicators of sexual abuse were missed by adults.

5.2 Institutional handling of concerns prior to formal disclosures

The degree to which institutions and professionals acted on or responded to early reports and concerns about alleged perpetrators’ behaviour varied across the case files. In 11 cases, there was evidence that institutions and professionals took some measures to address early concerns, such as sharing guidance and advice on professional conduct, implementing monitoring or supervision mechanisms, or issuing written warnings. In all cases, the alleged perpetrators continued to engage in inappropriate behaviour with children, which led to their eventual referral to the DBS.

In some cases, institutions and professionals were slow or failed to take any action at all to address initial concerns or allegations, and in many cases the early action was not proportionate to the severity of the concerns regarding an individual’s inappropriate behaviour with children. This may have been a result of organisational cultures; other research has highlighted that informal power structures within organisations can impede the detection of sexual abuse (Palmer and Feldman, 2018). Case files clearly showed that institutions and professionals missed their duty of care to spot safeguarding risks early, in line with ‘risk of harm’ thresholds (see section 3.1).

5.2.1 Written and verbal warnings

In nine cases across different sectors, there was a record of the institution giving verbal or written warnings to individuals in response to early concerns regarding their behaviour at work. Verbal warnings were typically the first measure, followed by written warnings.

Verbal warnings were often informal in nature and not documented. They typically included senior members of staff providing ‘advice’.

- For example, a member of staff at a comprehensive school was told to have a more professional relationship with students, and to only contact them on social media after they had left school (Sector: education).

- In another case, a school classroom assistant was given “*strong words*” following an incident which involved the alleged perpetrator sending inappropriate messages to a student (Sector: education).
- Similarly, in response to a colleague’s concerns about a teacher’s relationship with a student, who was known to have particular vulnerabilities, the teacher was advised to be friendly but not familiar with students, and to not spend time alone with students. This advice was followed up by email (Sector: education).
- In another case, there were concerns about the closeness between a teacher and a pupil, which were reported to the headmaster. The teacher was advised to be ‘cautious’ when interacting with students. Further allegations were made by one pupil about sexual activity between the teacher and another pupil. This was responded to with a final written warning (Sector: education).
- In a different case, the principal of a school emailed a teacher, following concerns regarding closeness with a student, and advised that they should “*focus on professional boundaries, the role of coaching is a powerful one but you must remember at all times that your focus is on learning*” (Sector: education).

5.2.2 Monitoring and supervision

In some cases where there were concerns about the alleged perpetrators’ conduct or performance at work, institutions took action in the form of monitoring and supervision.

- For example, in one case there were a number of early concerns regarding a teacher’s performance and behaviour at work, as well as concerns regarding the teacher breaking school policy by contacting a student on her mobile phone after exams. The school implemented a performance plan which included the provision of teaching support and more regular class observations (Sector: education).

In some cases, institutions conducted internal investigations in response to initial concerns. These investigations resulted in monitoring, supervision or reduced roles.

- For example, in one case, a nursery worker was told to limit his work to non-contact duties the morning after an allegation was made (Sector: childcare).

Despite these controls, individuals were allowed to continue working at the institutions and went on to further abuse their position, despite these disciplinary actions.

- The parents of a sexually abused child in one case reported to a college that a sports coach had spent the night with their child at a hotel. Concerns had also surfaced regarding the sports coach’s use of social media to contact other players. The college completed a full internal investigation and referred the case to the sport’s national governing body, children’s services and the police. The outcome was an interim suspension from under-18s sports and a short mentoring course to develop the coach’s understanding of professional boundaries. The Local Authority Designated Officer recommended that the alleged perpetrator should be dismissed. But the college determined that the mentoring sessions had been successful, evidenced that the individual had a heightened understanding of her professional boundaries and closed the case (Sector: sports and leisure).

Literature on preventing institutional child sexual abuse highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring and supervision of staff once employed, which should be documented through performance reviews (Wurtele, 2012). Organisations also need to navigate a balance between vigilance, monitoring and repercussions for behaviour alongside an openness for people to come forward with concerns (Wortley and Smallbone, 2006).

5.2.3 No action taken and missed opportunities

In a number of cases, institutions and professionals missed or actively blocked opportunities to safeguard children because they had not sufficiently assessed the 'risk of harm' that individuals in positions of trust posed, which would have necessitated earlier disciplinary action and a prompt DBS referral (see section 3.1 on 'risk of harm').

Assumptions were made about consensual relationships

In several cases, no action was taken by institutions because members of the institution assumed that adults and children were engaging in consensual relationships. This was pronounced in cases where there was a small age gap between alleged perpetrators and children.

- For example, in one case no action was taken because of this assumption, in relation to a football coach in her twenties and a 17-year-old player. At this time, the 'position of trust' legislation did not extend to sports contexts, therefore young people aged 16 and above were not protected by the position of trust rules under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and were perceived to be in legitimate relationships with alleged perpetrators (Sector: sports and leisure).

Positional power and authority protected alleged perpetrators

In some cases, alleged perpetrators worked in institutional contexts where their family members held positions of authority and, when concerns surfaced regarding their behaviour, they were protected by family members.

- For example, despite concerns being flagged regarding a youth instructor engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a youth, no action was taken by the institution. It was noted that typically the institution would have given instructors an ultimatum either to end a relationship or leave. However, in this case, the youth instructor was protected by family members who held senior positions of authority within the institution and this did not occur (Sector: voluntary and community).
- Similarly, in another case, it was noted that a child had told her friend that she had reported the alleged perpetrator to a number of adults in positions of authority within the church – all of whom were family members of the alleged perpetrator. The child was accused of lying, being silly, making things up and attention seeking, resulting in her disclosure being dismissed (Sector: faith).

These cases illustrate how family members protected alleged perpetrators and actively blocked opportunities to safeguard children. Wider literature echoes the point that formal power structures with single 'chains of command' and lines of authority within organisations can inhibit reporting of child sexual abuse (Palmer and Feldman, 2018). Safeguarding opportunities were missed in cases where individuals in positions of authority were closely associated with the alleged perpetrators.

Sometimes, an individual's reputation also served as a form of protection.

- For example, a teacher's reputation enabled him to work in a number of schools, despite numerous allegations surfacing throughout his career. In this case, even adults and parents who attempted to report the teacher had their concerns dismissed. At a previous institution, the senior members of staff determined that allegations of bullying and child sexual abuse were simply "not true" and that the teacher had "an impeccable employment history". Even though details of the alleged perpetrator's records appeared on an enhanced CRB check,²⁶ the headteacher of the referring college determined that there was no reason not to appoint the individual to the post. The case file noted that the Local Authority Designated Officer disagreed with this decision and felt that the college was "brave" to employ the teacher (Sector: education). In this case, it was clear that risk-based recruitment measures were ignored.

Children were not believed

There were cases where children made allegations which were not believed or taken seriously by adults.

- For example, it was recorded that a sexually abused child had disclosed concerns about a gymnastics coach to several other coaches who failed to escalate or address her concerns. Her disclosures were dismissed as "bragging" and were minimised, as the coaches determined she was making a "big deal" (Sector: sports and leisure).

In other cases, action was not taken because initial reports and allegations were deemed to be unsubstantiated due to a lack of evidence, conflicting witness statements or adults and children denying allegations (see section 5.4.4).

- For example, an anonymous referral to the NSPCC about a youth club leader was recorded as unsubstantiated. Action was only taken after further referrals were made (Sector: voluntary and community).
- Similarly, anonymous allegations regarding physical abuse at a foster home were also found to be unsubstantiated by a social care worker who interviewed the children in care (Sector: foster care).

All these cases resulted in institutional offending, which led to these cases being referred to the DBS. Institutions and professionals missed opportunities to arrive at 'risk of harm' decisions in light of these early warning signs. Such institutional behaviour has been demonstrated in previous research about institutional denial and 'group cohesion' mechanisms, which resulted in children's reports being discredited or disbelieved. This perpetuates cultures of silence (Smith and Freyd, 2014). Codes of silence entrenched in schools and healthcare contexts have in the past deterred whistleblowers and prevented disclosures and reports of professional misconduct from being made (see Brown et al., 2020; Zammit et al., 2020).

26 Prior to 2012, employers could request basic, standard or enhanced criminal history checks to be carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In 2012, the Criminal Records Bureau merged with the Independent Safeguarding Authority to create the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Today, these pre-employment checks are carried out by the DBS.

5.3 Disclosures

This section describes how disclosures of concerns were reported, to whom and by whom, and sets out some of the different types of barriers and facilitators to disclosures evidenced by the case files.

In most cases, disclosures and reports of incidents of child sexual abuse were made by children (including peers, siblings or friends), staff, colleagues and parents of children attending the institutions. In other cases, reports were made by individuals external to the institutions. In many cases, disclosures and reports had been made by more than one person, or on more than one occasion, particularly in cases involving multiple children.

Children faced a number of barriers to disclosure, including not recognising the behaviour as child sexual abuse, self-blame, fears about reporting and not having a safe space to report concerns. Children typically disclosed to trusted adults, including staff within institutions, family members or support services. Sometimes children confided in each other.

5.3.1 Disclosures made by staff, parents, colleagues or children attending institutions or specialist services

Sometimes parents contacted both the police and the institution if they were unsure who to go to, or if they felt their concerns were not being dealt with. In 13 cases, children made disclosures to parents or trusted adults within the institutions where the offending had occurred. In six cases, other children (friends or peers), who were attending the same institutions as the alleged perpetrators and victims, reported the child sexual abuse to their parents or members of staff. Children confided in others who went on to make reports. Children made disclosures to trusted adults, such as trusted teachers at school, Scout leaders, coaches, or to their parents. In cases where there were multiple children who reported being sexually abused and attended the same institution, children often confided in each other first, before disclosing to an adult.

- For example, a child in social care reported that a support worker was having a 'sexual relationship' with another child. She reported knowing about the abusive relationship because her friend had confided in her (Sector: social care).

Hearing that friends or peers had experienced the same child sexual abuse prompted other children to make disclosures to trusted adults.

- For example, in a case involving three young female students, two of whom were sisters, one child disclosed the sexual abuse to her friend, who in turn shared that she too had experienced the same abuse. In this case, one of the children had tried to report the abuse to her teacher, but felt unable to because her teacher did not listen to her. The two sisters eventually disclosed to their mother (Sector: education).

In three cases, children reported to health professionals, such as counsellors or clinical psychologists, some time after they had been sexually abused. Specialists facilitated escalating the reports of child sexual abuse to the Local Authority Designated Officer or to the police.

Concerns raised by the alleged perpetrators

In some cases, alleged perpetrators confided about engaging in sexually abusive relationships with children to other adults associated with the institution or raised 'concerns' about the children's behaviour.

- For example, an assistant coach had raised 'concerns' regarding a child's behaviour to other senior players. These senior players did not escalate the report to the club chairman, but another club member did make a report to the club's welfare officer (Sector: sports and leisure).
- In another case, a teacher disclosed that she was in a relationship with a pupil attending the school to the partner of the assistant headteacher, who then went on to make a report to the school principal and designated safeguarding officer (Sector: education).

Responding to rumours

Where rumours or gossip were circulating, individuals over-hearing these rumours sometimes reported their concerns.

- For example, a teacher overheard rumours about a colleague engaging in a sexual relationship with another student, including that the colleague had invited two female students to his house, and informed the school's safeguarding lead (Sector: education).

Digital evidence of child sexual abuse prompted disclosures in some cases, with the evidence being used to support the reports.

- For example, a member of staff in a school became aware of messages being sent to a student via social media, and shared screenshots of these messages with the college manager (Sector: education).
- In another case, a non-teaching member of the staff alerted the headteacher that a topless photo of the alleged perpetrator had 'gone viral' on social media (Sector: education).
- A child's mother in a different case found messages between the alleged perpetrator and her child and sent screenshots of these messages to the Local Authority Designated Officer (Sector: voluntary and community).

5.3.2 Disclosures made by individuals external to the institution

Some reports of child sexual abuse were made by individuals who were external to the institution where the child sexual abuse had taken place. Some reports were made by members of the public.

- For example, in one case, a foster carer would spend time with a foster child at a public swimming pool and members of the public expressed concern about their interactions. A formal report was made by the lifeguard.

Four cases in the sample involved other individuals making anonymous referrals to report concerns to the NSPCC, Local Authority Designated Officer or council.

- For example, anonymous allegations of physical abuse in a foster care case were found to be unsubstantiated (Sector: social care).

- In another case, an anonymous referral had been made from someone associated with the institution, who was fearful of the repercussions of making the report because the alleged perpetrator's family held senior governance positions within the institution (Sector: voluntary and community).

5.3.3 Barriers to reporting and disclosures

Case files highlighted that children, including witnesses such as friends or siblings, faced a number of barriers when it came to disclosing child sexual abuse.

Concerns about how parents, friends and family would react

In seven cases, sexually abused children were concerned about how family or friends would react to disclosures. This included worries about parents reacting angrily to disclosures, or children's concerns about disappointing their parents.

- For example, one child stated that they were worried about how friends and teachers would react to the disclosure (Sector: education).

Barriers to disclosure were also compounded by feelings of self-blame, in which children felt responsible for the child sexual abuse. Some individuals in positions of trust were held in high regard, and this was also a barrier to disclosure (see section 4.1.3).

- In one case a child reported that she was scared to report the alleged perpetrator because of "who it was about" (Sector: sports and leisure).

Concerns about repercussions for alleged perpetrators

Alleged perpetrators deliberately used strategies to sexually groom children and their families (see section 4.4.1) which made disclosures more difficult. In nine cases, a barrier to disclosure was that children believed they were in legitimate relationships with the alleged perpetrator, which made it difficult for some of them to recognise the relationships as abusive (see section 4.7.1).

Fear of disclosure

In six cases children had felt unable to make disclosures because they were scared of, or felt threatened by, the alleged perpetrators.

- One child had been "sworn to secrecy" (Sector: education).

Others were afraid that reporting the child sexual abuse would anger the alleged perpetrator and exacerbate the nature of the child sexual abuse. In the context of foster care, reporting child sexual abuse was perhaps even more challenging because children felt threatened, not just by the alleged perpetrator, but their entire family, and in these contexts children had limited opportunities to make safe disclosures.

- For example, one child described how her foster family was angry with her for making a disclosure regarding the foster father. The child was threatened by the alleged perpetrator's wife and children, who took her phone away from her and threatened that she could only have it back if she denied the allegations in court. The child explained that despite the sexual abuse, she wanted a "proper family" and the fear of losing the foster placement prevented her from speaking out (Sector: foster care).

Children and witnesses were much less willing to make disclosures to the police, because they were worried about the extent and repercussions of police involvement for themselves or the alleged perpetrator. A number of sexually abused children and witnesses went on to retract statements of disclosure, once the police became involved in the process (see section 5.4.3).

In some instances, it was clear that cultures of fear, such as power hierarchies within an organisation, were a significant barrier to reporting, particularly if the other members of staff, or children in apprentice or voluntary roles seeking to make the reports, felt their jobs may be compromised. These factors also worked together to isolate the child, which made disclosure more difficult. For example, one child explained: *“I had no one when it started”* (Sector: foster care).

The Inquiry’s Truth Project thematic research on child sexual abuse in different institutional contexts noted similar findings about victims and survivors facing a range of complex barriers to disclosure. Notably, in residential schools, custodial contexts and hospitals, victims and survivors reported that there were limited opportunities for disclosure, as they had no one to turn to, and often felt unsafe (Darling et al., 2020a; Zammit et al., 2020; Soares et al., 2019). In education contexts, complex feelings regarding perceived relationships between victims and perpetrators was sometimes a barrier to disclosure (Brown et al., 2020). Cultural issues, such as understandings and attitudes towards sex and sexual abuse, have also been identified as barriers to disclosure (Rodger et al., 2020).

5.3.4 Factors which facilitated reporting and disclosures

Information regarding factors that facilitated disclosures was limited in the case file analysis. In some cases it was noted that families, friends or support services (such as counsellors) encouraged children to report the child sexual abuse. Learning that other children had similar experiences, in particular when rumours surfaced linked to the same alleged perpetrator, encouraged children to report the sexual abuse. When disclosures were made by children, a common theme was children identifying safe spaces and opportunities for disclosure, such as a trusted family member, friend or adult who encouraged, listened to and guided children.

Time was another common theme in factors facilitating disclosures. Several case files indicated that there was time between the incidences of the child sexual abuse and disclosures. Sometimes this was a period of weeks or months; in other cases, disclosures were made years after the child sexual abuse.

- In one case, a girl reported that over time, she felt older and stronger and had more social support, which enabled her disclosure (Sector: foster care).
- In another case, a boy reported four years after the child sexual abuse, while at university, and to a clinical psychologist (Sector: education).

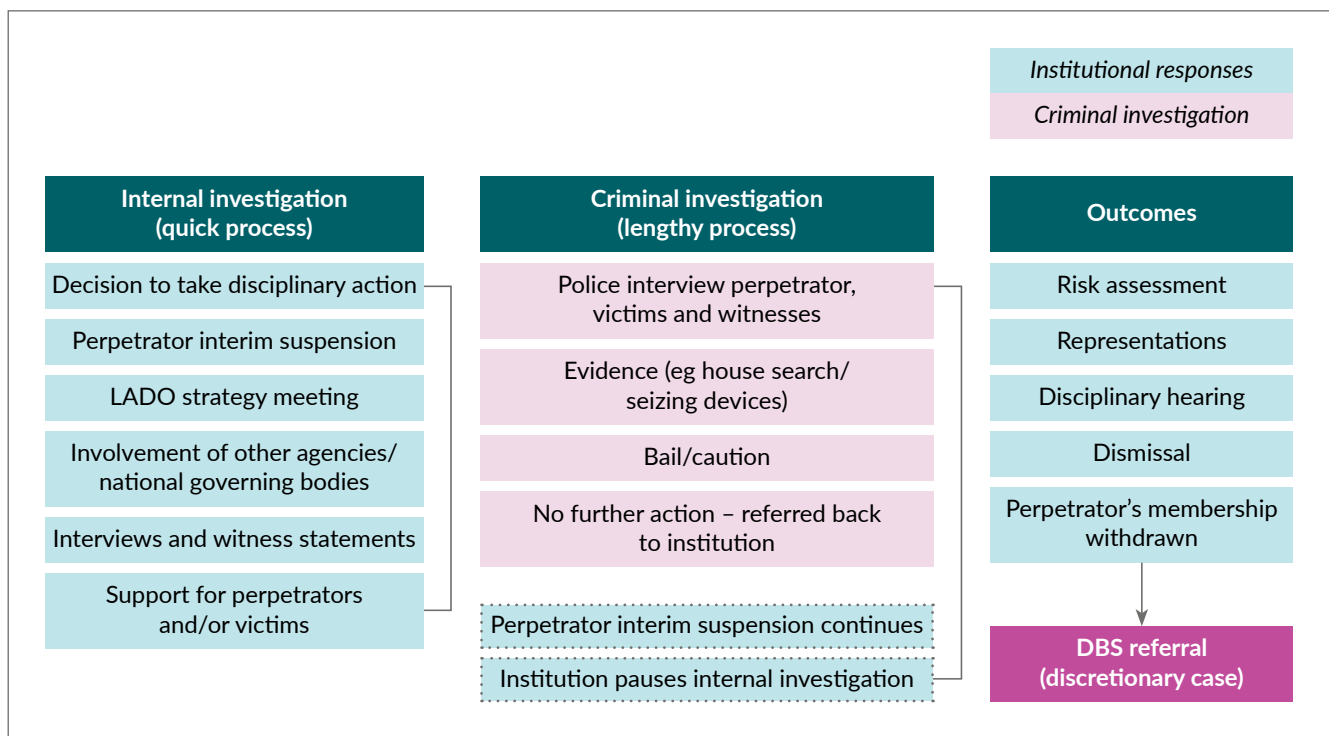
This reflects wider literature with adult survivors of child sexual abuse, who have reported delays of months or years between the incident(s) of sexual abuse and informal or formal disclosures (Smith et al., 2000). Some victims and survivors never disclose child sexual abuse, even in adulthood (McAlinden, 2012).

5.4 Responses to formal allegations by the institutions

This section describes how institutions dealt with ‘formal disclosures’ and allegations that were made to the institutions, and related to the offence that led to the DBS referral. This is distinct from the ‘informal awareness’ described in section 5.1. It also provides an overview of how these ‘formal disclosures’ of child sexual abuse were responded to, and the consequences for alleged perpetrators and children.

Figure 5.1 summarises the common elements of a typical response ‘pathway’, based on observations across the case files. Not all institutions followed this ‘pathway’ and the extent to which institutions handled allegations varied between cases and institutional contexts. Referral and response pathways were not always clearly presented in case files and the absence of information does not necessarily mean that institutions did not take particular actions, as it may be that these actions were simply not recorded or captured within the case files.

Figure 5.1: Common elements of a typical response ‘pathway’, based on observations across case files²⁷



5.4.1 Escalating reports

It is not clear from the case file information if there were clear and dedicated processes or safe spaces within institutions designed to support children, parents or staff to make disclosures. Children who came forward typically made their concerns known to trusted adults, and staff made their concerns known to other colleagues. In several cases, parents raised their concerns with both the police and the institutions, indicating that they may have been unsure about who to direct their concerns to.

27 This figure is based on observations from case file information and is not a representation of how all institutions handled allegations of child sexual abuse, nor is it portraying how institutions should handle allegations. Further information on the statutory guidance on inter-agency working can be found in the [Working together to safeguard children guidance](#).

Anonymous referrals were typically passed on to the Local Authority Designated Officer. In many cases, institutions involved dedicated safeguarding officers or welfare officers to support the process of handling allegations.

Information from the case files indicated that many institutions did have clear governance structures and that in most cases, formal allegations were taken seriously and escalated quickly to individuals in positions of authority such as headteachers. In faith contexts, allegations were escalated to religious leaders, and in childcare, social care and foster care contexts, concerns were typically raised with social workers or local authorities.

In sports and voluntary and community cases, it was common for institutions to notify national governing bodies and headquarters.

- For example, in one case, the unit leader of the national youth organisation notified the district and county commissioners, who in turn escalated the report to their headquarters (Sector: sports and leisure).
- In other cases, reports were escalated to national governing bodies such as the Cricket Association, Gymnastics Association, Football Association, Hockey Association and Swim England.

5.4.2 Investigating allegations internally

As mentioned in section 5.1, in many cases institutions knew about previous concerns regarding the alleged perpetrators. Furthermore, it was common for institutions to wait until multiple allegations surfaced or until multiple witnesses came forward before taking formal action. Therefore, while there were significant time delays between concerns surfacing and action being taken, once a decision was taken to formally investigate allegations, institutions typically reacted swiftly.

Institutions generally followed a similar process for investigating allegations internally

The case files indicated that most institutions followed a similar process when investigating allegations formally.²⁸ Case files described internal investigations and disciplinary processes. A disciplinary process typically involved the institution placing individuals on interim suspensions for the duration of the internal investigation process. It was common for managers and safeguarding officers to lead the internal investigation processes, and for institutions to interview children, alleged perpetrators and witnesses. This evidence was often presented at multi-agency or 'complex' strategy meetings, involving agencies such as Local Authority Designated Officers and representatives from childcare services, the police, national safeguarding teams and local authority representatives. It was also common for senior managers within the institution, who held governance positions, to attend strategy meetings. Strategy meetings were used to determine the institution's course of action, including for example, to set timelines for disciplinary hearings and to assess what safeguarding measures might be needed. Alleged perpetrators were normally given written notice of their interim suspension and information about the disciplinary process. In some cases, institutions conducted or contracted out risk assessments (such as expert psychiatric assessments), as part of the evidence gathering process.

28 Guidance on how investigations should be carried out differs depending on the institutional context. The Department for Education *Working Together to Safeguard Children* document serves as a guide to inter-agency working and sets out processes for managing individual cases.

It is important to note that case files may not have contained broader information about wider safeguarding actions taken by institutions because the purpose of DBS referral processes are to determine the risk that alleged perpetrators pose to children and vulnerable adults, rather than to assess the quality of safeguarding responses.

National governing bodies typically made high-level decisions regarding if, and to what extent, alleged perpetrators could continue working in institutional contexts. It was common for national governing bodies to suspend sporting memberships for the duration of an internal investigation and for memberships and accreditations to be permanently revoked at the end of the investigation. Some educational institutions referred cases of misconduct to the Department for Education, Teaching Regulation Agency or the Education Workforce Council (Wales), to make regulatory decisions. It was also common practice for institutions to pause internal investigations and disciplinary processes for the duration of a criminal investigation, so as to prevent bias or conflicts of interests that could affect court proceedings.

Disciplinary hearings resumed after criminal investigations were concluded, which often resulted in no further action by the police. The final part of an institution's internal investigation process normally concluded with a disciplinary hearing, which alleged perpetrators were invited to attend to present any mitigating circumstances. In these final hearings, institutions formally communicated the outcome of their decisions. Case file records showed that alleged perpetrators were often found guilty of breaching safeguarding standards, breaking professional codes of conduct and of gross misconduct, resulting in the individual being dismissed from the institution (see section 5.6).

5.4.3 Criminal investigations and police involvement

While many cases were subject to police investigations and involved serious sexual offences against children, few cases were pursued in court or resulted in a criminal conviction outcome. The threshold of evidence needed for barring individuals is lower than it is for pursuing a criminal conviction; see Figure 5.2. This does not mean that the incidents of child sexual abuse were less severe (see section 4.3 on the range of contact and non-contact offending observed in DBS case files).

Figure 5.2: Thresholds and standards of civil and criminal proof



Source: ICLR (2021)

Lack of evidence was a recurring theme referenced across cases and, therefore, many cases resulted in the police determining that evidence was insufficient to pursue a criminal conviction. In section 4.4, it was noted that alleged perpetrators may have intentionally isolated children, which contributed to the difficulty in proving sexual assault allegations.

- For example, a school caretaker was reported to have taken photos of young girls in the female toilets. In this case, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) could not pursue a charge of voyeurism because it could not be proven that the caretaker observed children in the toilets for the purposes of sexual gratification (Sector: education).

Case files also revealed that it was common for sexually abused children and witnesses to retract their statements and disengage from criminal investigations. As such, cases were ‘dropped’ due to lack of evidence.

Several cases involved allegations of offences which did not sufficiently meet the criminal threshold (see Figure 5.2). This was particularly true for cases in sports, faith and voluntary and community contexts, if the young person was aged 16 or over and position of trust legislation did not apply at the time (see section 1.4.5). In these cases, the police determined that there was no criminal case to answer, or determined that the relationship was consensual. There was one sports case where an application was made for a Sexual Risk Order²⁹ instead (Sector: sports and leisure).

In some cases it was clear that there was a lack of accountability with regards to safeguarding children.

- For example, in a case involving a sports coach, the police asked the child’s mother to report the indecent images which the child had received via Snapchat, directly to Snapchat. In this same case, appeals were made to the leisure centre to ban the coach from attending the viewing platform and watching female attendees, but the management team responded by saying that they could not physically ban the alleged perpetrator from a public space. No police action was taken, despite the fact that child protection officers and the Sports Association had determined that the individual was “*high risk*” (Sector: sports and leisure).

Many cases involved a police intervention. Sometimes this was a result of police having been contacted directly by witnesses or Local Authority Designated Officers; sometimes it was the result of the institution escalating concerns to the police. The police typically interviewed witnesses and alleged perpetrators and victims. In some cases, the police also seized items to be analysed as evidence, such as laptops and mobile phones. In some cases, individuals were arrested and released on bail. Bail conditions normally involved court orders, such as bans from engaging in sexual activity with children under the age of 18 or 16. There were cases where individuals breached their bail conditions. Only a couple of cases included information regarding criminal prosecutions; however, it may be the case that criminal investigations were ongoing at the point of DBS referrals, or afterwards, and that this information was missing from the case files.

Literature highlights that the clandestine nature of grooming and child sexual abuse means that there are often no witnesses or corroborative evidence, and that it is common for cases to be dropped due to a lack of evidence or because prosecutors determine that children and young people are unreliable witnesses (McAlinden, 2012).

29 A Sexual Risk Order is a court order which can be made in relation to an individual who is thought to pose a risk of harm; the order can contain a range of prohibitions to protect children or vulnerable adults from sexual harm (Information Hub, 2020).

5.4.4 Different approaches for managing formal complaints

Pathways for disclosing, escalating and handling allegations were less clear in foster and social care cases

The case file information indicated that not all institutions followed the internal investigations process described above and outlined in Figure 5.1. In education cases, governance structures and chains of accountability were clearer. Schools often had clear safeguarding policies and procedures to follow, when escalating and responding to safeguarding concerns. In contrast, channels for disclosing and escalating concerns in social and foster care cases were less obvious. This could be because these institutions were 'closed' and residential in nature, with fewer witnesses to observe and report concerns. In these cases, it was more common for disclosures to be made anonymously and directly to the Local Authority Designated Officer. It was much more difficult for sexually abused children to report the child sexual abuse, and it was also more difficult for allegations to be substantiated with evidence. In these cases, social care or child services staff typically interviewed alleged perpetrators and victims, and the onus was often on victims to corroborate concerns raised through anonymous referrals.

- In two foster care cases there were delays in removing children from care, in part due to the challenges faced by authorities in substantiating allegations, particularly if victims were reluctant to verify reports of inappropriate behaviour.

Research has shown that children who are in residential contexts, or 'total institutions'³⁰ (Goffman, 1961) such as foster care or residential schools, can be particularly vulnerable because they have less chance to 'escape' or they may have an 'enforced' dependence on the institution (see Brown et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2020).

Weak chains of accountability and delayed responses in healthcare

The healthcare case in the sample provided a clear example of weakness in chains of accountability, governance and safeguarding processes. The case was referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer but passed back to the healthcare trust for review. The healthcare trust reported that the child affected had never been an inpatient, and that they also did not have a record of the alleged perpetrator. Nine months after the initial report, it was uncovered that the child had in fact been an inpatient but on a different ward. A referral was eventually made to the DBS and the Nursing and Midwifery Council. Unlike other cases, where alleged perpetrators were typically quickly suspended from work pending an investigation, in this case, over a year lapsed between the initial disclosure and his suspension. The suspension was lifted five months later, after the individual completed 'essential training', and they continued to work for the trust. When the Nursing and Midwifery Council began its formal review, the alleged perpetrator was allowed to work under observation by another nurse. The individual went on to work with other employers by forging Nursing and Midwifery Council documentation (Sector: healthcare).

30 'Total institutions' refer to an institution having complete dominance over its members, who may live a closed life, cut off from wider society, for example, residential hospitals, custodial institutions and residential schools.

Not all alleged perpetrators faced disciplinary repercussions

Not all alleged perpetrators faced disciplinary repercussions. Some were able to resign or leave their post voluntarily before disciplinary proceedings could take place.

- For example, in an education case, a teacher resigned on the day he was due to attend a disciplinary meeting. The school accepted the resignation and issued a settlement agreement. The terms of the agreement included that the school could make appropriate referrals (such as to the DBS or police) but it was also agreed that they would provide a basic reference for future roles in which the individual would have no contact with children.
- In a faith case, elders became aware of historical allegations of child sexual abuse involving a youth leader. The youth leader was said to have been 'confronted' by elders. There was no information about a disciplinary process or local authority involvement but the church's Child Protection Agency suggested that the youth leader be removed from the ministry. The individual resigned from the ministry, and the elders agreed that this "*was the biblical response to his sins*", implying that no further institutional action would be needed (Sector: faith).

5.4.5 Challenges that institutions and staff faced in investigating and handling concerns

Institutions and staff may have faced a number of challenges in handling concerns. Staff may have found it difficult to corroborate allegations, deal with grievances and with younger alleged perpetrators.

Difficulties in evidencing and corroborating allegations

A common challenge which institutions faced was substantiating allegations with evidence, to inform the best course of action. It was common for institutions and staff to triangulate accounts between different witnesses to determine 'on the balance of probabilities' (see Figure 5.2) if the allegations were substantiated. This was challenging, as in many cases individuals denied any wrongdoing, witnesses were reluctant to come forward and sexually abused children also sometimes denied allegations or retracted accounts. Some institutions and staff questioned the credibility and motives of children and witnesses who reported concerns.

- For example, in one education case, police files noted that a sexually abused child had "*previous instances of dishonesty*" (Sector: education).
- In another case, the institution spent time establishing the 'good character' of both the alleged perpetrator and victims to determine who should be believed, and to establish if the children had colluded in developing their allegations (Sector: education).

This illustrates the impact of a victim-blaming narrative and how unhelpful and harming they can be to victims. Research reports the value and importance of a trauma-informed³¹ response to child sexual abuse (APPG ASCSA, 2020).

31 "An approach that recognises the psychological trauma caused by abuse, its impact across all aspects of a person's life, and which supports a person to recover from the trauma" (APPG ASCSA, 2020:4).

Case files indicated that institutions faced a common challenge in delicately balancing the need for gathering evidence to support internal investigation processes, without biasing or interfering with any potential criminal proceedings. Institutions faced greater difficulties investigating cases involving non-recent allegations, particularly if the individual concerned had already left their institution, and where more complex coordination between more than one employer and multiple agencies was required.

Grievances with investigation processes

Several case files referenced alleged perpetrators' grievances with investigation processes.

- For example, a youth club minister felt that the charity he worked for had adopted an “*assumed guilty stance*”, without taking into account his track record of working with hundreds of young people in the past, who could have provided positive statements in support of him. The alleged perpetrator was highly critical of both the police and the ministry's investigation process (Sector: faith).
- Another individual felt frustrated that the suspension period was so lengthy and that the process was not fair or transparent. The alleged perpetrator also reported that he had felt forgotten about by the school where he was employed, throughout the process (Sector: education).

Alleged perpetrators described that investigation processes had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing.

- An alleged perpetrator in an educational context described the investigation process as the toughest period of his life, with severe and detrimental impacts on him and his family.
- Another stated he felt “*burglarised and terrorised*” by police involvement, and feared that he would end up unemployed and homeless (Sector: education).

In some cases, individuals felt that allegations against them were not genuine, and that witnesses or children had made them vindictively or maliciously, including one individual who said he would never trust a young person again (see section 4.5). It was also not uncommon for individuals to decline to attend the final disciplinary hearing meetings.

Dealing with younger alleged perpetrators

As discussed in section 4.1.1, most of the alleged perpetrators were in their twenties or thirties at the time the offence took place. Some cases illustrated that institutions found it challenging to deal with this group of alleged perpetrators.

In a handful of cases, institutions and staff gave individuals within this age group “*the benefit of the doubt*”, believing that they may not have ‘known better’ or been aware of safeguarding rules and policies (see section 4.6.3). In these cases, institutions and staff acted with leniency.

- In the case of an 18-year-old youth instructor, the police concluded that his relationship with the young person was consensual. The case file, however, revealed that it was reasonable to believe that the alleged perpetrator engaged with a 14-year-old child for his own sexual gratification and was at risk of repeating this behaviour because he did not recognise it as causing harm (Sector: voluntary and community).

Where the age gap between alleged perpetrators and victims was relatively small, it was common in these cases for institutions and staff to mistakenly conflate abusive relationships with consensual relationships.

- For example, in a case involving a sports coach, the alleged perpetrator and 16-year-old child were spoken to by the club, and left alone in a room together to “*get their story straight*” (Sector: sports and leisure).

5.5 Institutional apathy, complacency and inaction

The examples that follow illustrate how institutional apathy, complacency, inaction or late action sustained opportunities for alleged perpetrators to continue to sexually abuse children in institutional contexts. Smith and Freyd (2014) identified the concept of ‘institutional betrayal’, which can contribute to a culture of institutional denial and a mechanism whereby victims, or those who make allegations, are discredited, disbelieved or isolated. The following examples from the case files illustrate how institutions ‘betrayed’ sexually abused children.

5.5.1 Inadequately escalating reports of child sexual abuse

Not all concerns were addressed with urgency or escalated immediately. In several cases, institutions responded to initial allegations or reports by issuing verbal or written warnings with varying degrees of formality (see section 5.2), but they did not make a DBS referral, conduct a risk assessment of harm or a full disciplinary investigation until further allegations surfaced.

In some cases, therefore, institutions missed their opportunities to safeguard children because they waited until there were further allegations, before taking more concrete actions to address concerns.

- For example, in one case, a child’s parent reported concerns to the sports club’s welfare officer. Although prior concerns had been raised regarding the alleged perpetrator contacting young female club members on social media, the club welfare officer did not escalate the report, but instead spoke to all coaches about the club’s policy on sending private messages to members. Action was only taken a year later after further reports were made by other parents and children. In this case, at least six young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years reported that they were sexually abused by the coach in the one-year period since the first allegation was made (Sector: sports and leisure).
- In another case, a parent made a report, to a sports club manager, that the alleged perpetrator was engaging in a sexually abusive relationship with his daughter. In this case, there was already institutional awareness that the same individual had engaged in a sexually abusive relationship with another club player four years prior. The manager responded by speaking to the alleged perpetrator and advising that she should “*break off any contact*” with the child. The club manager told welfare staff to “*keep an eye on things*”. The individual was only “*let go*” six months later and then went on to join another club. The manager noted that “*there was nothing we could do regarding what happened outside the club, we can only monitor what was going on inside the club*” (Sector: sports and leisure). This case exemplifies how reports of child sexual abuse, even with prior institutional knowledge of concerns regarding an individual’s inappropriate behaviour,

were not taken seriously or dealt with proportionately. In this case, both children were between the ages of 16 and 17, and sustained serious emotional and physical impacts from the sexual abuse. Safeguarding concerns were disregarded in this case, because the sexually abusive relationships were deemed by the manager as consensual.

5.5.2 Not believing children

There were a number of cases where the institutions did not believe children's disclosures, in particular in cases where individuals denied the allegations against them. In some cases, there was also clear evidence of institutions deflecting accountability for safeguarding children.

- In one case a child reported sexual abuse to her foster mother, who went on to escalate the report to social services. A social worker visited the alleged perpetrator – the foster father – who denied the allegations, and no further action was taken by the local authority. This was a missed opportunity for safeguarding, because the child's younger sister continued to live in foster care and was also sexually abused by the foster father. In this case, action was only taken after the young person reported the child sexual abuse again as an adult (Sector: foster care).
- A child in another case was asked to corroborate three separate anonymous referrals. The child was also threatened by the alleged perpetrator not to make disclosures, and in the end the girl chose to discontinue the investigation because she could not cope with the combined stress of school exams and the demands of the investigation process (Sector: voluntary and community).

5.5.3 Protecting alleged perpetrators

In some cases, institutions chose to preserve the alleged perpetrator's reputation and their own, above protecting children who reported child sexual abuse.

- For example, in a case involving a teacher, the parents of a child confronted the alleged perpetrator directly about their concerns and went on to report them to the head of a cathedral school, who said they would "*keep an eye on the perpetrator*". The parents felt that the school was not responding to their concerns and went on to file a police report. The head of the school responded saying he was very concerned about the family making allegations to the police and was worried that this would put the alleged perpetrator's "*career at risk*".

This case illustrates how the individual's reputation and, by association, the school's reputation, was put above the safeguarding concerns reported by parents; a finding consistent with other research (Westcott, 1991). In this case, the level of protection afforded to the alleged perpetrator was sustained for many years, despite there being known safeguarding concerns regarding a "*string of allegations*", including a previous criminal investigation. The individual allegedly went on to sexually abuse at least three children before institutional action was taken (Sector: education).

These findings highlight the power that organisational cultures have in fostering a context for child sexual abuse to occur (Palmer and Feldman, 2018).

5.5.4 Lack of coordination between agencies enabled alleged perpetrators to offend in more than one institution

Across case files there were several examples where vetting failures or missing information regarding an individual's criminal background meant that institutions did not sufficiently assess the risk they posed working within their institutions. Poor information sharing between institutions, and poor or inconsistent record keeping, allowed individuals the opportunities to continue offending across multiple institutions. This extends the idea of institutional betrayal as it highlights how institutions can collectively 'betray' victims and survivors (Smith and Freyd, 2014).

Case files highlighted poor vetting procedures or instances where the onus was placed on the alleged perpetrators to declare their own criminal histories.

- For example, a local authority deemed a 19 year old to be a suitable temporary foster carer, without corroborating information from wider sources, such as her GP. The temporary foster carer went on to sexually abuse the child in her care. Wider checks may have revealed important details about the foster carer's vulnerabilities (that she described as mitigating her behaviour) which could have been used to inform the risk and suitability assessment (Sector: foster care).
- In an education case, the college had not conducted a DBS check, because the alleged perpetrator had been a pupil before moving into a volunteer teaching role.

Other cases highlighted gaps in information sharing between the police and the referring institutions.

- For example, in one case an individual was being investigated for separate allegations against him relating to prostitution, trafficking and possession of indecent images, but the school where he worked was not aware of the investigation. In this case the police did not inform the institution; instead the onus was put on the alleged perpetrator to notify the school of this investigation, which he did not immediately report (Sector: education).

Missing the totality of an alleged perpetrator's behaviour

In some cases, record keeping, time-limited sanctions and information sharing by the institution was problematic.

- For example, in one case, the alleged perpetrator had received final written warnings for similar conduct but, as warnings were only kept on the personnel file for one year, the subsequent conduct did not trigger an automatic disciplinary action (Sector: education).

Similarities were observed in other cases where sanctions were time-limited and later expunged from records. In these cases, the totality of the individual's behaviour was missed and instead incidences were separated out.

Offending across multiple institutional contexts

The case files reviewed mostly detailed incidents 'within' rather than across institutions. However, instances were found where alleged perpetrators had left the institution and offended again elsewhere. In these cases, previous allegations had not been significantly investigated by employers, allowing the individual to move on and commit further offences. These cases demonstrated weak chains of information sharing between employers and agencies.

In cases where disclosures were made several years after the child sexual abuse took place, there was case file information which suggested that alleged perpetrators may have continued offending in different institutional contexts.

- In one case, there was a record of a string of offences and concerns relating to an alleged perpetrator who held a number of positions in churches or church schools. Employment records stated that the individual left one institution for “family reasons”, although the case records indicated that the reasons were related to his inappropriate behaviour. A warning was issued across faith-based institutions against hiring the individual. However, the alleged perpetrator was still able to secure employment working with children, because he transitioned from faith-based institutions, such as churches, to schools, with the most recent referring institution having determined that previous allegations were simply “not true” without any formal investigation (Sector: education).

Literature shows that the effectiveness of pre-employment prevention screening checks is limited because institutions only check potential employees against criminal records or lists of individuals convicted of sexual offences (Wurtele, 2012). Other research has also highlighted that inadequate record keeping and information sharing was a factor that contributed to non-disclosure of child sexual abuse (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volumes 4 and 8).

Employers recruiting new members of staff are not legally required to carry out a DBS pre-employment check, and pre-employment checks which are typically carried out before an individual joins an institution only provide a ‘snapshot’ of information at the point that the check is requested. Employers may also fail to capture wider information and records from regulators. Furthermore, employers do not always corroborate information contained within employment references with other sources. Employers providing references to other organisations have a duty to ensure that the information contained within an employment reference is fair and accurate. However, references can be brief and may not necessarily disclose details of gross misconduct or other disciplinary concerns, especially in references which fall under a ‘compromise agreement’. Where a referral has been made to the DBS, the institution may not necessarily know about the outcome of their referral unless they can justify why they need this information.

5.5.5 Inconsistencies in safeguarding policies and narrow understandings of safeguarding

Several cases noted an absence of appropriate policies or gaps in the content or quality covered by existing policies. It was also clear that many institutions considered safeguarding as a ‘check box’ exercise, with a focus on annual training or obtaining signatures on policies. Safeguarding policies were visited only after allegations or concerns surfaced. It may be the case that cultures of safeguarding practice were not fully integrated into institutional ways of working and embodied by leadership and management.

- In one case, it was noted that various previous incidents involving safeguarding concerns about the alleged perpetrator had arisen but were poorly managed and that gaps existed at an institutional level in relation to training and professional codes of conduct for football coaches generally (Sector: sports and leisure).

In a small number of cases, alleged perpetrators appeared to have not had any safeguarding training and, in others, they had received it but significant time (several years) had lapsed without receiving any refresher training.

Where information was provided, there was significant variation in the amount and frequency of safeguarding training offered by the institution and undertaken by the alleged perpetrator, even within the same sectors.

- For example, in one case the individual concerned received safeguarding training five years prior to the allegations made against them (Sector: education).

In other cases within the education sector, safeguarding training was delivered annually. The frequency of safeguarding training did not always correspond to individuals' roles; for example, a tutor working with students had not received recent safeguarding training, whereas an individual working in estates received training annually.

There also appeared to be narrow understandings of safeguarding among alleged perpetrators and institutions. This was illustrated in cases where institutions did not address concerns regarding alleged perpetrators in sexually abusive relationships, determining that adolescents, especially those aged 16–18 years, were in consensual relationships. Regardless of whether the young person concerned was over the age of legal consent, institutions did not consider safeguarding from an abuse of power, trust and authority perspective, in which individuals were clearly breaching professional boundaries with children under their care.

5.5.6 Poor compliance and enforcement of safeguarding policies

There was some indication that alleged perpetrators had an awareness of relevant policies that governed their behaviour but actively chose not to adhere to the rules.

- In three cases, alleged perpetrators had been directly involved in developing or delivering safeguarding policies or training. In these cases, they were potentially afforded a level of protection against scrutiny as they held advanced positions of trust and assumed responsibility by their involvement in safeguarding policy development or training.
- In one case, the alleged perpetrator had attended and delivered extensive safeguarding training as part of his role at the institution, and had delivered safeguarding training to his team at the charity he worked for (Sector: faith).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator was involved with strengthening interventions to improve safeguarding practice. The individual developed policies around strengthening DBS checks, and revising training to include explanations of the position of trust and code of practice regarding use of social media (Sector: sports and leisure). In this case, the alleged perpetrator had not signed the code of conduct policy for several years and had not undergone safeguarding training. The alleged perpetrator also went on to reoffend within the same institution, despite having demonstrated this heightened level of safeguarding awareness.

Research suggests that inclusive and child-safe organisational cultures are paramount and should be led by senior management and endorsed by staff at all levels (Kaufman et al., 2016).

There were many examples of institutions with relevant safeguarding and social media policies in place which governed contact with children. In some cases, alleged perpetrators were noncompliant and went unchallenged as safeguarding policies were poorly enforced, particularly in relation to social media use between staff and children. It is possible that social media policies were not appropriate or practical, and there may have been contradictions between social media policies and the informal, institutional cultures in which social media contact between adults and children within the institution was normalised.

Research highlighted the importance of continual education on child sexual abuse for staff, including the role of social media and 'e-grooming' (Wurtele, 2012), because perpetrators are often able to exploit institutional policies to hide in plain sight (Palmer, 2017).

5.6 Consequences and support for alleged perpetrators and victims

A limitation of analysing information from DBS case files is that the files contain information specifically focused towards the assessment of risk by alleged or potential perpetrators, as that is the function of the DBS. Information on consequences and outcomes for sexually abused children is limited because this is the function of other support agencies (see section 3.3). Consequences for alleged perpetrators and victims included either short-term measures, implemented quickly at the time of disclosure, or involved longer-term measures.

5.6.1 Consequences and support for alleged perpetrators

Consequences for alleged perpetrators varied across the cases, depending on the institutional response and the nature of the allegations. In most cases, they faced short-term consequences when an institution became formally aware of the allegations. These measures usually lasted the duration of an institution's internal investigation. Individuals faced longer-term and more permanent measures once a final decision was made by the referring institution, as to whether the claims made about an individual's behaviour were substantive or not.

Short-term consequences for alleged perpetrators

Upon receiving a formal complaint or allegation, institutions typically implemented short-term measures at the start of the institution's internal investigation process. Alleged perpetrators were most often given an informal or interim suspension. As part of these interim suspension conditions, alleged perpetrators were suspended from their work duties, removed from the institutional premises and asked not to make contact with any members of the institution. For individuals who worked in residential contexts, such as residential schools, these restrictions included limiting access to their accommodation.

In some cases, alleged perpetrators were not the only individuals affected by the outcome of the disciplinary processes.

- For example, in the case of a sports coach who was being investigated by the police, the individual's son was also banned from attending the club (Sector: sports and leisure).

The extent to which alleged perpetrators' duties were limited, and the timeliness of these restrictions, varied across the cases. Some individuals were banned from attending the institution altogether; others had work responsibilities reduced.

- For example, in one case, two witnesses reported seeing an alleged perpetrator with an erection after a baby had sat on his lap at a nursery. The next morning, the individual was allocated “non contact” duties, before being suspended (Sector: childcare).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator was told not to do any “lone work” and not to attend specific meetings, before being formally suspended (Sector: voluntary and community).

In most other cases, alleged perpetrators were given immediate suspension orders, pending a disciplinary hearing.

Several case files cited legal short-term measures, which typically came into effect when the police were investigating the allegations, for example individuals were being held for questioning and having electronic items seized as evidence. Some alleged perpetrators were ordered to adhere to bail conditions, such as no contact orders with under-18 year olds or under-16 year olds. Other bail conditions included not having sole possession of personal electronic internet devices. In one case, a temporary foster carer was given a Community Resolution Order³² to not engage in sexual activity with anyone under the age of 16 (Sector: foster care). It was not always clear from the case files how long these bail conditions remained in place.

Long-term consequences for alleged perpetrators

Long-term consequences for alleged perpetrators were typically determined by the outcome of the institution’s internal disciplinary hearings and investigation processes. In cases where there was police involvement, the outcome of the institution’s investigation was often decided after a criminal investigation was complete. Alleged perpetrators were often interviewed as part of the investigation process and invited to attend final disciplinary hearings. In the majority of cases, the final outcome of the disciplinary hearings was immediate dismissal by the referring institutions. Many cases cited gross misconduct, inappropriate conduct, breach of position of trust or breaching safeguarding standards, as the grounds for dismissal.

Most cases which ended in dismissal from the referring institution also included a ban from national governing bodies associated with the institutions.

- For example, in one case, a volunteer group assistant at a local club was found to be engaging in inappropriate conversations with a child and banned from a sports and voluntary association, including a ban on playing, coaching, attending or refereeing where children were playing or present (Sector: voluntary and community).

Similar bans were common among other sports or voluntary and community cases. Not all alleged perpetrators faced complete bans from institutional contexts; some bans were limited to contact with children or regulated activity.

- For example, in one case, the alleged perpetrator was told that he could join a new club as a player and attend social events, on the condition that he did not undertake any coaching activity, and any change in clubs would need to be reviewed by the Sports Club Board (Sector: sports and leisure).

32 A Community Resolution Order is an Out of Court Disposal used for low-level offences in England and Wales since 2013. It involves the offender accepting responsibility for the crime and offering a suitable reparation outcome (such as an apology or financial remuneration). Victims are involved in the decision-making processes of community resolutions (Metropolitan Police Service, n.d.).

In cases relating to other institutional contexts, alleged perpetrators were often stripped of professional membership of regulatory bodies.

- For example, a foster carer was deregistered as a foster carer (Sector: foster care).
- In faith cases, alleged perpetrators had their ministerial accreditations revoked (Sector: faith).

As noted in section 5.4.4, in some cases, alleged perpetrators chose to resign during the disciplinary hearing process, rather than waiting for a formal dismissal outcome. In a few cases, the individuals went on to make appeals, although in most cases appeals were rejected and the original judgements of the disciplinary hearings were upheld. The severity of permanent measures imposed on alleged perpetrators varied between cases.

In some cases the alleged perpetrators had more than one job, and sometimes both roles involved working with children (see section 4.1.2). It is not clear from the case files how and to what extent institutional investigations impacted their jobs, in particular in cases where the individuals may have been self-employed (for example, offering private coaching or tuition).

Support for alleged perpetrators

In ten cases there were records of support being offered to individuals by their employers after an allegation of child sexual abuse had been made against them. This included employers making an effort to keep in touch with individuals during investigation processes.

Some employers signposted alleged perpetrators to counselling, their GP, employment assistance or union services.

- In one case, a teacher at a secondary school was sent written guidance for staff and volunteers facing allegations by the school. He was also offered support from his GP, union and occupational health (Sector: education).

Some employers provided financial security to alleged perpetrators, for example by keeping them on full pay during interim suspensions, and for the duration of internal investigation processes, in line with internal disciplinary policies.

Others offered reassurances of financial security.

- For example, in one case the alleged perpetrator was reassured that she could return to work on extra shifts to make up for financial losses during the investigation process. She was also offered support from the clinical lead at the social care agency and from her line manager, including regular correspondence to be kept updated with the outcome of the internal investigation (Sector: social care).

A few of the cases illustrated that institutions recognised that they had a pastoral responsibility for alleged perpetrators.

- For example, in one case, the school was worried about the wellbeing of a female teacher who allegedly was in an abusive relationship with a male student. The teacher was asked to leave the school immediately but they were also concerned about her wellbeing and organised for her to be driven home and to spend an evening with a friend (Sector: education).
- Another case recorded that, at the time of the internal investigation, the deputy head asked if the school should have been providing more pastoral care so that the institution is not perceived to be “*coldly carrying out an investigation*”. There was no further information in this case as to whether pastoral care was given further consideration by the institution (Sector: education).
- In another case, the alleged perpetrator was an esteemed teacher and was offered protection from the media during the investigation process by the referring college (Sector: education).

Although many of the cases cited above offered support for the alleged perpetrator around the investigation and impact of the allegations of child sexual abuse, previous work from the Inquiry has discussed the challenges in perpetrators of sexual offences (although not those offending in institutional contexts) seeking support preventatively (Senker et al., 2020). This work also discussed how the stigma and shame associated with child sexual abuse can prohibit perpetrators’ engagement with support and treatment both before and after offending.

5.6.2 Consequences and support for sexually abused children

Consequences for sexually abused children

Information on the consequences of DBS referrals for sexually abused children was limited. Some cases described the physical separation of contact between an alleged perpetrator and victim.

- For example, in one case, the alleged perpetrator, who worked as a personal coach at an independent school, was removed as the child’s one-to-one mentor following initial awareness of the individual’s behaviour crossing professional boundaries (Sector: education).

As noted in section 5.4.3, many children withdrew their allegations at the point of police involvement, contributing to a high attrition rate in these investigations. Even for those children who did cooperate with the criminal investigations, many of the cases ended with no criminal outcomes (see section 5.4.3 on criminal investigations).

Support for sexually abused children

Only three cases recorded that support was provided to children. This included help from institutions or the police in writing victim statements or referrals to children’s services. It is important to note that there may have been support for children but that this may not have been recorded or captured within the cases. Research from the Australian Royal Commission (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volumes 6 and 7) suggests that support should be given to children and young people in how to make complaints, and that institutions should have child-focused complaints handling procedures, policies and processes and designate a point of contact for responding to complaints and allegations.



CHAPTER 6: Key research findings

This final chapter presents the seven key findings of the research.

1. Alleged perpetrators across different types of institutional contexts used similar tactics and methods to sexually groom and sexually abuse children

There was no 'one profile' that characterised all alleged perpetrators across the cases and institutional contexts. However, they used a range of common, and sophisticated, sexual grooming tactics to target and isolate children.

Consistent with the wider literature on child sexual abuse within and outside of institutions (Darling and Hackett, 2020; Erooga et al., 2012; Romito, 2008), alleged perpetrators across the 43 cases used similar tactics and gradual and methodical grooming strategies, including:

- targeting and isolating children;
- building friendships which developed into sexually abusive relationships, based on trust and codependency with children; and
- befriending children's peers and families over time.

These grooming strategies were used by alleged perpetrators to conceal the child sexual abuse and to legitimise the sexual behaviour.

Alleged perpetrators harnessed their professional reputations and authority within institutions to manipulate other adults, exploit children and perpetrate child sexual abuse undetected. Cases illustrated that they were often charismatic, competent individuals who were well liked and respected by colleagues. Positive perceptions of alleged perpetrators resulted in offending behaviours being ignored, minimised or excused by those around them. There were several examples of staff and institutions emphasising the alleged perpetrator's positive contributions to the institutions, which deflected from the allegations of child sexual abuse. Alleged perpetrators exerted power and control over children and colleagues, making it difficult for children and witnesses to report allegations or challenge inappropriate behaviours.

Mirroring findings from previous studies (Smith and Freyd, 2014; McKenna et al., 2012), a common method used by individuals to sexually groom children included befriending children and perpetrating child sexual abuse through social media.

Alleged perpetrators also befriended families, creating opportunities to see the child on their own (by giving the child lifts to the institution in sports and leisure cases, or offering extra tuition in education cases) and buying food and gifts for the children or their families. Often the grooming behaviour meant families trusted them. For example, parents provided petrol money for alleged perpetrators to give lifts to children or invited alleged perpetrators to their home for social occasions. Where these methods became less successful, or the children and families withdrew from the alleged perpetrator, common tactics to maintain control and abuse of the child included blackmail or threats. For example, there were threats that the alleged perpetrator would harm themselves; that they would lose their job; or that children would not be believed or would get into trouble for disclosing the child sexual abuse.

When concerns were reported, alleged perpetrators typically relied on one of four strategies to explain, hide or justify the child sexual abuse:

- They denied the child sexual abuse at all, saying no contact had occurred.
- They admitted the contact occurred but denied it was child sexual abuse, using tactics such as victim blaming or describing the sexual abuse as a consensual 'relationship'.
- They admitted the contact occurred but minimised their responsibility, for example by claiming that they had made "*mistakes*" or "*poor judgements*", sometimes as a result of ill-health and life stressors (Romito, 2008).
- They disputed that they held 'positions of trust', therefore safeguarding policies did not apply to them and had not been breached.

2. Most child sexual abuse took place in physical locations away from the institution, or in private and unsupervised spaces where children were isolated by alleged perpetrators

The physical environment has been identified as particularly relevant in child sexual abuse, as it often takes place in locations away from third-party surveillance, described as 'target locations' by Kaufman et al. (2012). Typically, these are locations where children are isolated and where there is little or no monitoring, supervision or access. Research has established that the presence of third-parties and the possibility of being observed are key factors cited by perpetrators of child sex offences that would have stopped them completing a sexual offence (Wortley et al., 2019).

In the cases analysed in this research, very few of the allegations related to offences occurring within institutional premises. In nine cases, the child sexual abuse took place on site at the institution, usually out of sight and in private spaces, such as disused classrooms, toilets or libraries. In such cases, alleged perpetrators often chose 'target locations' with limited surveillance and opportunity for third-party observation, such as using club and sports buildings and school classrooms out of hours.

Other common locations where children were sexually abused external to the institutions included cars and the homes of alleged perpetrators and victims. In most cases involving physical contact, the child sexual abuse occurred in multiple locations. Manipulating safe and private spaces, such as bathrooms, as sites to perpetrate child sexual abuse and taking children to perpetrators' homes is a finding echoed in the Inquiry's [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools](#).

In cases where the child sexual abuse did not involve physical contact, it was primarily perpetrated via social media or text messaging. In other cases, where there was physical or contact child sexual abuse, the abuse took place in hotels or other external premises, including bathrooms in buildings used by the institution during trips.

Despite previous research highlighting the important role that institutions' physical spaces played in facilitating abuse and hindering detection, the analysis found that external sites were more common. Whether the child sexual abuse took place in external locations, or within the institutional premises, alleged perpetrators chose to remain out of sight, with a preference for private and unmonitored spaces where children could be isolated. By isolating children in unsupervised spaces, they created opportunities to sexually abuse children in private, reducing the risk of detection.

3. Sexual grooming and child sexual abuse frequently took place using technology or online and via social media

The process of sexual grooming online mirrored the same gradual and systematic sexual grooming tactics that alleged perpetrators applied offline and in person. Sexual grooming online often began with them using social media platforms to connect with, befriend and sexually groom children. Conversations with children often escalated to regular instant messaging exchanges which were used to develop a rapport with children and gain their trust and dependency. The nature of the child sexual abuse online sometimes escalated to the use of sexualised language, imagery or the use of live-streaming or video calls to perform sexual acts. Contact with children online or through text messaging offered alleged perpetrators opportunities to be in frequent – and in some cases almost constant – contact with children, throughout the day and evening, and often unsupervised.

Social media, instant messaging and technology more generally were primary tools used to sexually groom children and perpetrate child sexual abuse. Snapchat was often the social media platform of choice because it was popular among children and young people, and pictures and messages shared via Snapchat were only available for a short time before they became inaccessible to their recipients. This feature afforded alleged perpetrators a level of protection by minimising the risks of detection. However, in some cases concerned staff members or parents were able to use screenshots of messages and Snapchats when reporting alleged perpetrators to institutions.

The use of technology and social media to perpetrate child sexual abuse is widely recognised as a primary tactic in contemporary child sexual abuse literature and has been described as ‘e-grooming’ (Wurtele, 2012). Wurtele identified that social media and technology has exacerbated the prevalence of child sexual abuse because it offers perpetrators more opportunities to access children and offend while remaining undetected.

4. Institutional cultures allowed informal contact and over-familiarity between alleged perpetrators and children, and this enabled individuals to sexually abuse children without raising suspicions

In the cases analysed, over-familiarity and physical contact between adults and children was a common finding. Informal social relationships, social gatherings and contact with children was normalised within institutions. These informal relationships provided adults with opportunities to sexually groom and abuse children without raising suspicions. In many cases, alleged perpetrators were able to disguise the child sexual abuse under the guise of these informal relationships without raising concern. Many of the behaviours that provided the scaffolding for abuse, such as normalised informal social interactions between adults and children, were not considered ‘unusual’ or potentially harmful by institutions.

In almost all of the cases analysed in this research, alleged perpetrators had developed an informal social relationship with the child. This is commonly observed when the alleged perpetrator is in a trusted position or where the child is sexually abused within an institutional context. Existing literature has identified that perpetrators often engage in extensive social interaction with their victims, described as rational and strategic grooming (Palmer et al., 2016). In the cases reviewed for this study, these social relationships existed overtly and were often normalised through a culture of socialising and informal contact between adults working with children.

A range of behaviours associated with informal institutional cultures were observed in the case files, including sharing cars (giving children lifts to the institution or related events, or taking them home), socialising outside of the institution, for example going to the pub or fast-food restaurants, and contacting and befriending children via social media or instant messaging.

These behaviours and activities often formed part of the culture of institutions, particularly in sports or leisure clubs, societies, and voluntary and community sectors, as well as in schools and residential care homes. As some of these behaviours were not in themselves harmful (for example, giving lifts to sports players), alleged perpetrators were able to manipulate these norms to sexually abuse children without detection. As members of the wider institution also typically engaged in these informal social practices and activities, alleged perpetrators' and victims' reports were not believed nor acted upon.

In some cases, these behaviours were viewed by the institution (and in some cases, children's families) as an indication of professional commitment, and were encouraged and rewarded accordingly. This is a common tactic adopted by perpetrators to groom victims and their families and was described by Kaufman and colleagues (2016) as 'institutional grooming'.

5. Alleged perpetrators and institutions framed sexually abusive relationships as consensual and romantic relationships

In a significant number of cases, perceived romantic relationships (distinguished here from the informal social relationships or friendships described earlier in this chapter) between adults and children were common and normalised. Adults, both alleged perpetrators and staff working in institutional contexts, conflated sexually abusive relationships with consensual relationships. This served to normalise and disguise abusive behaviours and led to institutions not properly assessing risk of harm nor appropriately handling concerns or allegations where 'relationships' were known to have been formed by adults with children under their care.

In some cases, children had been groomed to believe they were in consensual relationships, hindering their ability to recognise and disclose incidents of child sexual abuse. In some institutional contexts, child sexual abuse was concealed due to the wider informal social relationships that commonly occurred. This in turn created cultures of silence where children were reluctant to report the child sexual abuse for fear of not being believed, or out of fear of disclosures triggering a formal response which would get the perpetrator into trouble or end the relationship. This was a finding also reported in other research into child sexual abuse in institutions (Brown et al., 2020; Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, 2020).

In several cases, it was clear that institutions and adults also played 'bystander' roles, being aware of professional misconduct without taking proportionate action or escalating concerns. In some cases, those outside of the institution were aware of the relationship and were supportive. In one case, the alleged perpetrator was invited to live in the family home. This support sometimes continued even after the individual had resigned or had been subject to institutional disciplinary action.

The sexual grooming of victims and their families is a common finding in the literature on institutional child sexual abuse (for example Kaufman et al., 2016; Colton et al., 2010). The misconceived perception that alleged perpetrators were in relationships with children served to legitimise the sexual abuse and may have led to some institutions, families and young people unknowingly enabling the offending to take place or continue.

6. There were numerous missed opportunities to safeguard children because concerns were not escalated, disclosures were not always believed and institutions and staff did not share, record and respond appropriately to low-level concerns

Across the cases, disclosure pathways were often poorly established which may have made it difficult for children, peers or concerned adults (including colleagues or family members) to raise concerns. This finding is consistent with those reported in the wider literature, particularly work from the Australian Royal Commission (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Volume 4). In some institutional contexts, particularly child social care, residential schools and foster care, there were limited opportunities for children to make disclosures, because children felt there was no one to turn to.

In some cases, institutional cultures of fear and silence meant that institutional staff were often passive bystanders, who were aware of the conduct or heard or spread rumours about the alleged perpetrator's behaviour and child sexual abuse of children, but either felt silenced or failed to escalate concerns.

More broadly, there were vetting and information-sharing failures across and between institutions. Case files demonstrated that even where individuals had known criminal histories or where employment records noted a history of inappropriate behaviour, institutions knowingly ignored concerns or failed to sufficiently assess risk of harm. In some cases, alleged perpetrators had been subject to disciplinary action or warnings for previous misconduct but this had not been kept on file or shared between institutions and agencies. Consequently, the totality of behaviour was missed and instead incidences were separated out and evaluated individually, rather than building a full picture of the abusive behaviour. This allowed individuals to re-offend in other institutional contexts, illustrating institutional betrayal and institutional blindness (Smith and Freyd, 2014). This could also have been the result of 'weak' organisational structures which allowed some institutions to be '*naïve about the possibility of abuse*' within their organisation (Sheldon, 2021:15).

There may be more safeguarding risks involved when individuals are self-employed, have multiple jobs or work in voluntary roles, because individuals may not be independently vetted or bound by wider institutional safeguarding standards and policies. Furthermore, opportunities to disclose and report concerns may be very limited.

In some cases where children did disclose the child sexual abuse, their experiences were dismissed or minimised, or the blame was shifted to them. Alleged perpetrators were able to deny the child sexual abuse was occurring by shifting responsibility to sexually abused children, minimising or disguising the sexual abuse, or reframing the behaviour as legitimate. Parents and staff were generally taken more seriously when making reports of concerning behaviour and escalating reports on behalf of children, although there were cases where even parents felt that their reports were not taken seriously.

In several cases, the informal social relationships between alleged perpetrators and victims were known and flagged as inappropriate. Cases revealed that these low-level concerns were often not fully investigated and institutional actions were not always proportionate or timely in addressing the severity of the concerns. Institutions often responded with informal warnings, "*strong words*", leaflets on appropriate behaviour or reminders about acceptable conduct and institutional policies. These informal and late responses supported the underlying notion that there was a broader cultural acceptance of these behaviours (social media contact, socialising with students).

The distinction between allegations and concerns was not always clear and this ambiguity raised challenges in institutions striking a balance between having enough information to make a report and taking swift action. Furthermore, there is no one legal definition of 'harm', therefore safeguarding decisions and responses varied between institutions. Institutions may have faced a number of challenges in handling concerns. Staff may have found it difficult to navigate complex safeguarding processes, such as assessing risk of harm, distinguishing between allegations and concerns, determining how and when to escalate reports, and dealing with difficult subject matter and vulnerable children.

As a result of inaction or institutional complacency, alleged perpetrators went undetected and continued to sexually abuse children. Across cases, there were inconsistencies in what constituted harm, how risks of harm were assessed and where concerns met the threshold of an allegation that should have been formally addressed. These findings are consistent with previous research on child sex abuse in institutions, which notes that failures to implement safeguarding policies and conduct adequate risk assessments are common (for example, Palmer et al., 2016).

7. Institutions and staff did not consistently apply safeguarding policies and had narrow understandings of safeguarding responsibilities

Cases contained examples where institutions had relevant safeguarding and social media policies in place, which governed contact with children. In some cases, it was clear that despite having these rules in place, alleged perpetrators did not comply with them. In cases where wider institutional cultures of informal social contact were normalised, there were contradictions between the policies that governed contact with children and what was deemed acceptable in practice. This meant that non-compliance with safeguarding policies often went unchallenged.

Several cases referred to institutional social media policies which restricted or prohibited the use of social media to communicate with students, but policies were not always clear, appropriate or practical and enforcement was often poor. It was unclear in some cases whether the alleged perpetrator was aware of the policy or had signed it. In other cases, alleged perpetrators had an awareness of relevant policies that governed their behaviour but actively chose not to adhere to the rules.

In some cases, staff did not escalate or disclose concerns, or exhibited disinterest and apathy in relation to sexually abusive behaviour. These cases exemplified that safeguarding policies were not upheld at all levels by all members of staff, and safeguarding 'responsibilities' were not always seen as everybody's business. This is inconsistent with the fundamental safeguarding principles which stress that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone working within an institution at all levels. This highlights the importance of having robust policies in place, along with establishing wider cultures which empower staff, volunteers, children and parents to raise concerns safely and in a timely manner, triggering an appropriate response in line with the institutional policies and protecting children from child sexual abuse.

Where case file information was provided, there was significant variation in the amount and frequency of safeguarding training offered by the institution and undertaken by the alleged perpetrator, even within the same sectors. In some cases, safeguarding training had not been completed. In many institutions, safeguarding training and the associated policies were considered one-off events. Safeguarding practices were often not updated to reflect institutional and societal changes in knowledge and guidance. The level that policies and training had been assimilated, not just attended, by staff also went unchecked, including in cases where an alleged perpetrator's role had expanded to

include closer contact with children over the years of their employment. Cases indicated that staff did not always have a clear understanding of the laws surrounding positions of trust, in particular when working with children between the ages of 16 and 18 years.

Some institutions had a narrow or limited understanding of safeguarding, focusing only on the age of consent and ignoring wider safeguarding practices and duties of care regarding positions of trust. Alleged perpetrators often relied on this to explain, and defend, the child sexual abuse. Others denied they were in a position of trust as part of their defence. According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is unlawful for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child in their care, even if the child is 16 years old and above the age of consent. Even where the child sexual abuse was deemed by the police not to cross the criminal threshold, there appeared to have been significant gaps in understanding within institutions about what would amount to a safeguarding concern and what sorts of allegations should trigger formal institutional action.

Reflections

Despite significant legal and policy reform to raise awareness and safeguard children from sexual abuse, perpetrators can access and sexually abuse children in contemporary institutional contexts in many of the same ways reported in non-recent child sexual abuse cases.

Technology, in particular social media, provides new opportunities for adults working in institutions to access and sexually abuse children. In many institutions, informal social contact between adults and children enabled the alleged perpetrators to sexually abuse children without raising suspicion and may have made it more difficult for sexually abused children and concerned adults to report concerns. Most child sexual abuse occurred outside of institutional premises, which was in part facilitated by cultures of informal contact between adults and children, including giving lifts and spending time outside of the institution in social settings, such as pubs or on trips away from the institution. Although most institutions had safeguarding policies, these did not always include social media use and we observed several instances where safeguarding policies were not up to date or training had lapsed.

There are a number of knowledge gaps which other agencies might wish to explore, including:

- the role of technology in enabling child sexual abuse and in disclosing or responding to child sexual abuse;
- how organisational cultures and other institutional and situational factors could be changed and improved to better protect children from sexual abuse within contemporary institutional contexts; and
- how to close the gap between institutions' formal safeguarding policies and their informal practices.



Appendices

● Appendix A: Methodology

Appendix A1: DBS referrals and discretionary case file information

Table A1.1: Types of DBS cases

Case type	Description
Discretionary referral cases	Referred by employers, regulators etc where there are, or have been, concerns about that individual's behaviour with children or vulnerable adults which have led to them being removed from or leaving their position. These cases engage the discretionary decision-making powers of DBS unless the behaviour results in a caution or conviction for a prescribed offence; such cases are reclassified as 'autobar' cases.
On application for an enhanced disclosure	When an individual is applying to work in regulated activity, and there is something in an individual's criminal record or non-disclosure police information that indicates there may be a risk to a vulnerable group. If the criminal record includes a caution or conviction for a prescribed offence it will be reclassified as an 'autobar' case.
On receipt of a caution or conviction for a specified offence (also referred to as 'autobar' cases)	<p>These cases are referred to as 'autobars'. This is because, when the DBS is notified of cautions and convictions for certain offences, it is compelled by law to include the individual in the Children's Barred Lists as well as or in addition to Adults' Barred Lists. The most serious offences mean the individual cannot make any representations to challenge the bar.</p> <p>Some offence types mean the individual will be automatically barred but does have the right to make representations to the DBS before they are included in the barred list(s). These cases are called 'autobar with representations'. The DBS will only proceed with these cases if a link to regulated activity can be confirmed and that link may only be established on application for an enhanced disclosure.</p>

When should referrals be made?³³

- Referrals should ideally be made after an investigation has been done to determine if the allegation has foundation. The DBS relies on evidence submitted as part of the referral process and seeks to gather information.
- If a decision is taken by an organisation or provider of regulated activity to dismiss or remove the person from working in regulated activity, and the organisation thinks the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the risk of harm test, or been cautioned or convicted of a relevant offence, a referral should be made to the DBS.
- If a regulated activity provider or employer removes someone from the regulated activity (for example, as a result of disciplinary action), they have a duty to refer the individual to the DBS, irrespective of the circumstances of their leaving employment.

³³ For more information visit the DBS [Guidance on making barring referrals to the DBS](#).

- It is good practice for investigations and disciplinary processes to be completed even if the individual has left employment.
- Referrals should be made even if a significant period of time has elapsed between the allegation and the investigation.

Table A1.2: Types of information contained within DBS discretionary referral case files

Information type	Description
Police and probation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basic information relating to criminal records and previous offences ● Information relating to probation services ● Police investigation notes ● Police interview transcripts
DBS correspondence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mitigating evidence and representations from the referred individual to the DBS, such as testimonials or references from individuals who know the referred individual ● Minded to bar letters explaining the potential DBS barring decision
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employment history ● Job descriptions, CVs or contracts ● Minutes of disciplinary hearings as well as or in addition to appeal hearings and associated correspondence between employers, regulators and the individuals concerned ● Internal as well as or in addition to external risk assessments ● Witness statements supporting disciplinary hearings and decisions
Professional regulators or national governing bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting minutes or information from professional regulators or national governing bodies, such as the General Medical Council, Health and Social Care Professions Council, Teaching Regulation Agency, Football Association etc
Social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Copies of local strategy meetings ● Locally conducted risk assessments
Medical information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant medical information relating to recent or past concerns about the individual's conduct (for example, alcohol abuse; mental health problems impacting on work)
Other evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Such as copies of social media, email or text message exchanges

Appendix A2: Details of the final sample

Cases were eliminated if they did not clearly meet the inclusion criteria. Cases were also eliminated on the following basis:

- Files were corrupt and electronically inaccessible.
- The relationship between the alleged perpetrator(s) and victim(s) was not established within an institutional context.
- The case did not involve a sexually abused child attending an institution where the alleged perpetrator held a position of trust (for example, cases which involved viewing sexual imagery online).
- There was no information about the referring institution or perpetrator's gender.

The data in some of the tables below total more than 43 because there may have been multiple barred individuals, children as well as or in addition to incidents of child sexual abuse within any one case.

Table A2.1: Sectors covered by the sample

Sectors* covered by the sample	No.
Education (for example, faith schools, primary and secondary schools, higher education colleges and academies, including art and music academies, independent schools and state schools)	17
Voluntary and community (for example, Scouts, Girl Guides and cadets)	8
Sports and leisure (for example, hockey, swimming, cricket, gymnastics and football clubs)	7
Foster care	4
Social care	3
Faith	2
Childcare	1
Healthcare	1

*Cases were categorised into sectors by the DBS.

Table A2.2: Gender of barred individuals and sexually abused children

Gender of barred individuals at the time of the child sexual abuse	No.	Gender of sexually abused children at the time of the child sexual abuse	No.
Female	11	Female	51
Male	32	Male	19

Table A2.3: Age of barred individuals and sexually abused children

Age* of barred individuals at the time of the child sexual abuse	No.	Age of barred individuals at time of barring**	No.	Age of sexually abused children at the time of the child sexual abuse	No.
17-18	4	17-18	1	0-5	1
19-20	4	19-20	2	6-9	2
21-24	6	21-24	5	10-15	34
25-29	8	25-29	6	16-17	25
30-39	13	30-39	12	18-19	3
40-49	7	40-49	9	Unknown	2
50+	1	50+	8		

* If this spanned over several years, then it refers to the barred individual's age at the time that the child sexual abuse commenced. In some cases, due to lack of information from the case files, this information was extrapolated based on the individual's age at the point of DBS referral.

**Some of the case files included allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse, so the age of barred individuals at the time of the child sexual abuse is significantly younger in a small number of cases.

Table A2.4: Nature and duration of the child sexual abuse

Mode of perpetration	No.	Nature of the child sexual abuse	No.	Duration of child sexual abuse	No.
Cases involving lone perpetrators	41	Contact	34	6 months or less	16
Cases involving co-perpetration	2	Non-contact	34	7-12 months	2
				1-2 years	6
				2-3 years	3
				3-4 years	5

● Appendix B: Glossary

'Abusive relationships'	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Alleged perpetrators	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Barred individuals/adults	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Child	A person under the age of 18.
Child sexual abuse	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
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 sexual activities, as well as or in addition to another or others performing sexual activities on them. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology.
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.
DBS discretionary referral case files	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Grooming	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Impact	A marked effect or influence on someone or something. It is used in this report to describe what victims themselves reported about the effects of the child sexual abuse they experienced.
Institutional contexts	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Local Authority Designated Officer	Every local authority has a statutory responsibility to have a Local Authority Designated Officer who is responsible for coordinating the response to concerns raised about an adult who works with children and may have caused them, or could cause them, harm. Not every case we analysed had necessarily resulted in a Local Authority referral.
Organisational culture	The culture of an organisation is made up of the norms, values, behaviours and practices which distinguish appropriate from inappropriate participant or member attitudes and conduct.
Patriarchy/patriarchal	Describes a social system that is organised to perpetuate the interests and power of men over women throughout society and within individual relationships.
Position of trust	See section 1.4 for notes on terminology.
Qualitative case file analysis	Qualitative research uses words and themes, rather than numbers, to answer research questions. Qualitative social research seeks to observe and understand social situations without measuring them using numbers, for example through interviews with people involved. Qualitative case file analysis refers to qualitative analysis of case file data, such as public records.



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