Report of the Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders

Mary O'Toole, SC

June 2024

Volume 1

Volume 1

Executive Summary

On 7 November 2022, the RTÉ Documentary On One: Blackrock Boys was broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1. The documentary described the accounts of Mark and David Ryan, two survivors of sexual abuse at Blackrock College, Dublin. Following the broadcast many men came forward from this school and others, outlining similar experiences. The Minister for Education, Norma Foley T.D. subsequently announced the establishment of a Scoping Inquiry to inform the Government's response to revelations of historical sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders. Central to this approach was a Survivor Engagement process, to enable consultation with survivors and to learn what is important to survivors now and what the next steps should be.

The Scoping Inquiry was established on 7 March 2023 as a non-statutory inquiry. We were asked to complete a number of tasks, the foremost of which was to set out a potential framework for a Government response that, in so far as possible, would best meet the outcomes sought by survivors of historical sexual abuse.

The detail of the work done and recommendations made are set out in the body of this Report.[1]

As a Scoping Inquiry it was not our function to investigate the allegations of historical sexual abuse referred to in this Report. We make no findings of any kind in this regard.

1 The Executive Summary sets out the main recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry. To see all of the recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry, and the reasons for those recommendations, see Chapter 25: Conclusion: Potential Framework for a Government Response.

A. The Extent of Allegations of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Religious Orders' Schools

Having sought information from a range of sources, we have found that the primary direct source of data on allegations of sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders was the religious orders and schools themselves. We requested the religious orders that ran schools to provide us with information as to the number of allegations of historical sexual abuse arising in respect of those schools. The Scoping Inquiry appreciates the co-operation it received from the religious orders in this regard. Through a process of issuing questionnaires and follow-up correspondence with the religious orders we have found that:

- in total, there are 2,395 allegations of sexual abuse in respect of 308 schools recorded by the religious orders that ran those schools.[2] A full table of the numbers of allegations and alleged abusers recorded by each of the 42 religious orders concerned is set out in Chapter 9;[3]
- these allegations are made in respect of 884 distinct alleged abusers;
- the number of schools with allegations of historical sexual abuse shows that such allegations are not confined to schools in any particular geographic or social category. However, there are some schools where particularly high incidences of allegations of historical sexual abuse are recorded. A school-by-school breakdown of allegations recorded by religious orders is set out in Appendix 7;
- the total number of allegations likely exceeds that figure, given the level of underreporting of childhood sexual abuse noted in the Central Statistics Office Sexual Violence Survey.[4]
- the religious orders' records indicate that over half of the 884 persons accused of historical sexual abuse are known to be deceased;
- there is a particularly high number of allegations in special schools.[5] 17 special schools recorded 590 allegations involving 190 alleged abusers.[6]

2 These figures include community schools where the religious order are only co-patrons. Excluding community schools the relevant figures are 2,375 allegations in respect of 293 schools.

3 Some 42 of the 73 religious orders that run schools confirmed that they had allegations of sexual abuse falling within the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference, and particularly within the period 1927-2013.

4 Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2022 Survey of Sexual Violence. See discussion of the Sexual Violence Survey in Chapter 23.

5 The term 'special school' refers to schools for pupils with special educational needs.

6 This is reflective of a wider pattern of rates of abuse of disabled people tending to be higher than rates of abuse in the general population.

B. What Survivors Have Told Us

This Report sets out what survivors of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders told the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement team about their childhood experiences, the impact on them as children and as adults up to the present day and what they want the Government to do next.

The accounts given by survivors of their experiences of sexual abuse in schools set out in this report are distressing and often harrowing to read. This is noted at the beginning of Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. Reading these accounts of abuse may be extraordinarily difficult, particularly for those who have been abused or whose loved ones have been abused. It is no failing on any person's part if they do not wish to do so.

On the establishment of the Scoping Inquiry, people were invited to register their interest in participating in the process, which was open to all former students of day and boarding schools run by religious orders. Some 205 people, the overwhelming majority of whom were men, completed questionnaires about their experiences. In their questionnaire responses, survivors spoke of experiences of historical sexual abuse in schools in at least 22 counties in Ireland, naming over 80 schools, run by 24 religious orders. The incidents of sexual abuse were, in the main, described as having occurred between the early 1960s and the early 1990s, with the highest number of reported incidents occurring in the early to mid-1970s. Of those completing questionnaires, 182 were assessed as falling within the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference and invited to the second stage.

Following the completion of questionnaires, 149 participants whose experiences fell within the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference opted to take part in the second stage of the process, where they could choose to give an interview to a trauma-informed facilitator or provide a written submission. 137 participants completed in-person interviews and 12 participants provided written submissions. These interviews and submissions form the basis for the Survivor Engagement team's report.[7]

This trauma-informed process was key to ensuring that participants had choice and control over what they told us and how that information was documented. Participants did not have to answer set questions in their interviews, and could choose to say as much, or as little, as they wanted about any topic. In the course of these meetings, participants spoke frankly, and often eloquently, of their memories, insights, loss, and pain, and for this the Survivor Engagement team is extremely grateful. In some cases, this was the first time they had told the full extent of their

7 The contributions contained in the 205 questionnaire responses and the views of persons who fell outside the Scoping Inquiry's remit are also described in the Survivor Engagement Report.

experience of sexual abuse and its impact on their lives. Due to the age of the participants now, many were able to describe how their experiences had impacted every part of their lives. It was evident that for some, the experiences of sexual abuse recounted had a devastating impact on their childhood and that the effects had lasted throughout their lives.

For many participants, their stories explain that there was no place or sense of safety in their schools or indeed, their lives, as a result of their experiences of sexual abuse. Appalling childhood sexual abuse is described by participants and is reported as occurring in various locations including in classrooms, dormitories, sports facilities, and at musical and extracurricular activities. Some reported being sexually abused in their own homes by adults associated with their school who had gained their family's trust, only to abuse that trust egregiously. Participants described being sexually abused in the private offices and residential quarters of school staff and religious order members.

Many spoke of being sexually abused in the presence of other children or adults, and others reported being sexually abused when alone with a teacher, priest or religious brother, other school staff or a visitor to their school. Many recounted that the sexual abuse had been ongoing, whilst others said it had occurred randomly, or followed a period of grooming, and was often reported as having been accompanied by ferocious violence. Participants described being molested, stripped naked, raped and drugged amidst an atmosphere of terror and silence. Many spoke of their strong belief that what was happening was so pervasive that it could not possibly have gone unnoticed by other staff, and the members and leadership of the religious orders. Many participants were very clear in their belief that there had been a cover-up in their schools or by the religious order and some believed there was collusion between some institutions of the State and the Church.

Participants spoke of their fear, shock and naivety about the sexual abuse when it occurred. They described how it evoked in them feelings of shame, responsibility, isolation, powerlessness and secrecy. Participants described trying to avoid the sexual abuse, avoiding their favourite activities, their friends and ultimately their school. Some described how, as children, they began to experience mental health problems and adopted unhealthy coping mechanisms including the misuse of alcohol and drugs, and how some of those problems followed them into adulthood. Many described their confusion about why it happened to them and some said that other children sometimes tried to warn them about risky situations or certain staff. Participants spoke of their confusion about their own developing sexuality, and also of declining academic performance which limited their opportunities in education and employment later on. Many participants said that they felt that the power of the Catholic Church permeated their lives in every way and, for the majority, they felt

there was no one they could tell, including their parents. For some this has led to lifelong estrangement or difficult family relationships. Many said that their childhood stopped the day the abuse started.

As adults, participants said the impact of the sexual abuse led to serious and ongoing difficulties in relationships, mental and physical health problems, addiction issues, lost career opportunities, and damage to their sense of place and/or community. Many described failed early intimate relationships and marriage breakdowns. Some said that, as a result of the sexual abuse, they decided not to have children, or when they did, it impacted their parenting, with many participants describing the effects of intergenerational trauma on their families. Many spoke with very real sadness of the impact of telling their elderly parents of their experiences. Participants spoke of difficulties with authority figures in employment, with their long-term solution being to undertake contract work or self-employment. Other impacts on careers included lost opportunities to go to university as a result of poor academic progress or inappropriate behaviour in employment resulting from mental health difficulties and addiction. Some participants outlined how they had successful careers as they worked excessively, at the cost of their close relationships, to distract themselves from their early trauma. Participants spoke of emigrating and creating distances from family and friends to avoid traumatic memories. Many described becoming alienated from religion and church-related services to the extent that some avoided attending a parent's funeral or other family event, as they could not enter a church.

Participants frequently described a crisis in adulthood, such as a suicide attempt or time in a rehabilitation programme, as a time when their childhood experiences came to the fore for the first time and were identified as a source of their difficulties, and this realisation began the process of healing. The majority of participants who, in later years, approached the religious order seeking acknowledgement said the encounter had not been helpful, especially where it involved a defended legal process, although a minority found the experience helpful where a sincere apology was offered with compassion and meaning.

C. What Survivors Want the Government to do Next

A key purpose of the Scoping Inquiry was to ask participants what they wanted the Government to do next. In advance of the interviews, participants had been given a booklet setting out options and also inviting other proposals. The responses, set out in detail in Chapter 7 of the Report, show that two matters particularly emerged as key concerns that most participants wanted, namely a statutory inquiry and a redress scheme.

(i) A Statutory Inquiry

It was important to participants that any process have the power to compel attendance and documents, and that there would be a published report, and access to the process for the public and the media. However, it was also important that the process would be inclusive for survivors, which means that it must have an option to give evidence in private for those who are unable to speak publicly, as well as an option to speak in confidence about their experiences. Survivors were also clear that it is vital to mitigate the risk of retraumatisation in participating in an inquiry process in so far as possible.

Most survivors said that they wanted a statutory inquiry. The two models of statutory inquiry in Ireland are Tribunals of Inquiry (under the Tribunal of Inquiry (Evidence) Acts 1921 to 2002), and Commissions of Investigation (under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004). It is also possible to establish a bespoke statutory inquiry, (an example of this is the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse) but this would require passing special legislation, and would be likely to cause significant delay in the establishment of a future inquiry, which we considered would not be appropriate in light of the views expressed by survivors that a future inquiry be established as quickly as possible.

As to the type of statutory inquiry that survivors wanted, most said that an inquiry process that was the least adversarial possible was desirable. However, most survivors also said that they wanted an inquiry held in public, because they felt this would be the best way to hold the religious orders and others to account and to prevent any cover-up of historical sexual abuse in schools. Those who wanted an inquiry held in public were concerned that a future process would have sufficient powers to compel witnesses and documents to fulfil its purpose.

The default position for a tribunal is that it sits in public. The default position for a commission is that it sits in private. Each however, has the power to do the opposite in certain circumstances. Tribunals are generally considered to be the most adversarial model of inquiry, with proceedings very similar to that of a court, affording the full range of procedural rights to a person accused of wrongdoing before a tribunal, including a right to cross-examine their accusers. Commissions are less court-like in their processes than tribunals. Commissions are intended to be speedier and more flexible in their processes and have statutory powers giving them flexibility as to whether it is necessary, in order to fairly determine an issue, for other parties to cross-examine a witness or be present while a witness is giving evidence. A commission may also hear evidence by video link or recording.

There is some difficulty in reconciling the views that evidence should be heard in public, which would generally require a tribunal, the most adversarial model of inquiry, and the view that an inquiry process should be as non-adversarial as possible. In assessing the type of inquiry that should be established, we also considered the views of most survivors that any inquiry process should be as inclusive as possible, to encourage the broadest range of survivors to come forward. Many participants said they did not want to give evidence in public or be cross-examined.

Our view is that any inquiry process should be as inclusive as possible. The more court-like processes of a tribunal risk discouraging survivors from coming forward and would pose a greater risk of retraumatisation. The procedural flexibility of a commission affords the least adversarial model of inquiry, and therefore the greatest prospect of reducing the risk of retraumatisation. A commission model is also likely to be speedier than a tribunal model of inquiry.

We recommend that a Commission of Investigation pursuant to the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 be established.

(ii) Financial Redress

There is a clear mandate from the Survivor Engagement process that a redress scheme should form part of the Government response. Many survivors expressed the view that the religious orders should pay for, or contribute to, a redress scheme.

There was wide acknowledgement that redress can never heal the damage done to those who had experienced childhood sexual abuse. Participants said that there has been a financial cost for many in accessing necessary therapeutic support, and that there have been real impacts on people's employment and earning potential as a result of the after-effects of the childhood sexual abuse they reported. Some who had attended fee-paying schools also spoke of the sacrifices parents had made to

send them there. Not all participants wanted redress for themselves, but they were broadly supportive of it being available for those who do.

We recommend that, in early course, consideration be given by the Government to establishing a redress scheme for survivors of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by the religious orders. We further recommend that the Government approach the relevant religious orders about contributing to a redress scheme.

(iii) Establishment of a Survivor Engagement Programme

The function of the proposed Survivor Engagement Programme is to provide survivors who cannot, or do not wish to give evidence before the Commission, an opportunity to recount their experiences on a confidential basis and in a wholly non-adversarial environment.

We envisage a process similar to the Survivor Engagement process established by the Scoping Inquiry. However, the proposed Survivor Engagement Programme would have a broader remit in that it will also allow the families of survivors, and other relevant persons to recount their experiences. This would allow the families of those who have died to be heard while also casting light on the wider impact of historical sexual abuse. The Survivor Engagement Programme would produce a report in relation to the experiences of those who come before it and include proposals to the future Commission as to how those experiences should inform future policy on the impact of historical sexual abuse on the lives of those affected. The Report would also seek to raise public awareness of child sexual abuse and its lifelong impacts.

It is not intended that the Survivor Engagement Programme would hold formal hearings, act as a public inquiry, conduct a formal legal process, or make findings. It will not identify any person or institution in its report. Instead, it will identify broader themes, systemic concerns, and proposals as to future policy and practice concerning survivors of historical sexual abuse in schools, for the consideration of the Commission. The proposed functions of the Survivor Engagement Programme are set out in greater detail in the Terms of Reference appended to this Report.

We recommend that a Survivor Engagement Programme be established by the Commission in accordance with the proposed Terms of Reference in this Report.

D. Terms of Reference of a Commission

We set out in Chapter 26 of the Report our proposals for the Terms of Reference of a Commission.

(i) Scope of Commission

Most survivors said that they wanted an investigation to look at what happened in schools, who was responsible for what happened, whether there has been a cover-up and what can be learned. Survivors wanted to establish what had been known by religious orders and school management at the time and what actions had been taken. If no action had been taken, they wanted to investigate why that was so.

Survivors also wanted the role of An Garda Síochána, health and social services, and government departments to be investigated as to what was known about the prevalence of sexual abuse during relevant periods, and if steps were taken to address any concerns or issues identified.

The type of investigation desired by most survivors fits into the rubric of an investigation into the handling of allegations, concerns and suspicions of sexual abuse in schools. Such an investigation would be able to look at what was known at the time, what steps were taken, and if no steps were taken, why that was; whether there were cover-ups, or co-ordinated actions, and whether persons accused of abuse were moved to other schools or institutions where they continued to have access to children.

An investigation into the handling of abuse allegations will involve hearing from individuals, including survivors, about their experiences at the time. The Commission will then examine what was done about those concerns, suspicions or allegations by the religious order/school concerned. If a Commission were to be tasked with making specific findings of sexual abuse, this would inevitably involve a much more adversarial approach, akin to a mini-trial.

Given the scale of historical sexual abuse allegations revealed in the records provided by the religious orders, and the numbers of schools in respect of which allegations are made, the speediest and most effective approach to discovering what the scale of complaints and concerns were in relation to particular orders and schools, and how they were dealt with, is to task the future commission with examining the handling of abuse complaints and concerns.

The Scoping Inquiry recommends that the Commission investigate the handling of historical sexual abuse allegations and concerns and suspicions of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by the religious orders.

(ii) Inclusion of All Schools

During the course of our work various individuals and bodies spoke of their concerns about the relatively narrow focus of the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference, because it was confined to day and boarding schools run by religious orders only. In our view, an approach that excludes from consideration all other schools where historical sexual abuse may have occurred would be arbitrary and difficult to justify. We recommend, therefore, that consideration be given to extending the remit of the future commission to all schools in due course.

However, we recommend that any such considerations should not delay the setting up of the Commission to deal with sexual abuse in day or boarding schools run by the religious orders; the Scoping Inquiry has already undertaken significant preliminary work in this area and it is important, in light of the views expressed by survivors of schools run by religious orders, that the Commission be established as quickly as possible.

There is a mechanism under the 2004 Act that enables the Minister to extend the Terms of Reference of a commission, with the consent of the commission, and provided that this does not prejudice anyone who has come before that commission to give evidence or provide documents. It seems to us that this mechanism might be utilised to extend, in due course, the work of the Commission to other schools.

We Recommend that consideration be given to extending the Terms of Reference of the Commission to all schools.

(iii) Proposed Framework for a Commission

We recommend that the future Commission be as survivor-centred as possible, consistent with fair procedures. To that end we recommend that, in so far as possible, the following arrangements be put in place:

- Consultation with survivors and other stakeholders: At the outset of the Commission's work, time should be set aside for preliminary consultation with a wide range of survivors and other stakeholders, to consult on issues such as language and nomenclature, how survivors and stakeholders will engage with, and communicate with the Commission and the Survivor Engagement Programme during the course of its work.
- Transparency: The Commission and the Survivor Engagement Programme should provide clear and regular information on how they intend to go about their work. Furnishing clear explanations as to the differences between the Commission and the Survivor Engagement Programme and providing practical information on issues such as waiting times and when a survivor is likely to be called to give evidence will be of clear benefit to survivors.

- Regular Communication with Stakeholders: The commission should establish a means of regular communication with all stakeholders, particularly survivors, in an accessible manner, about the Commission's ongoing work and any interim findings or rulings of the inquiry. The development of an inquiry website would be essential to achieve this.
- Support for Survivors: At key stages of the process, when survivors are preparing statements, giving evidence before the Commission or attending at the Survivor Engagement Programme, and in the aftermath of these stages, survivors should have access to appropriate one-to-one support, as required, to assist in reducing the risk of retraumatisation.
- Training: Future Commission members, staff and their legal teams should receive appropriate and adequate training to understand trauma associated with sexual crimes.
- Practical Steps: We recommend consideration of a number of other practical measures as set out in Chapter 25 to facilitate survivors in giving their evidence in a manner that minimises retraumatisation.

We recommend that, in furtherance of a survivor-centred approach, the Commission should put in place the arrangements set out above, and in relation to the 'Practical Steps' give consideration to putting them in place as far as practicable and consistent with fair procedures.

(iv) Policy Focus of Commission

The future commission may make such recommendations as it deems necessary as a result of its investigation, with particular focus on policy matters relevant to survivors.

The Commission shall receive a report from the Survivor Engagement Programme and may have regard to any proposal in such a report in respect of policy matters relevant to survivors, particularly in relation to managing lifelong impacts of childhood sexual abuse, in making its recommendations.

We recommend that the Survivor Engagement Programme furnish a report to the Commission and that the Commission may have regard to any proposal of the report, including in respect of policy matters relevant to survivors and the lifelong impact of child sexual abuse, in making its recommendations.

E. Best Practice Findings Regarding Restorative Justice and Child Protection

(i) Restorative Justice

We set out elsewhere in this Report our conclusions on restorative justice, and the independent report commissioned by the Scoping Inquiry in respect of same. In summary, the report found that there was a divergence of approach amongst the 10 orders surveyed, with some using a 'facilitated approach' and other using a 'pastoral approach'. The report concluded that the 'facilitated approach' is to be preferred as more closely mapping onto traditional and best practice models of restorative justice processes.

By way of response to this conclusion, one religious order that operates a 'pastoral' approach fairly noted that this is, in their experience, an approach sought by survivors themselves, and that they have specialist lay staff trained to facilitate their processes in relation to survivors and that these staff are sufficiently independent to carry out this purpose. It thus appears that while a facilitated approach is in line with international best practice in restorative justice, a pastoral approach may nonetheless be appropriate in particular cases.

In addition, the independent report outlined areas for improvement in restorative justice initiatives run by the religious orders as including: compensation; preparedness; understanding survivors' perspectives; and collective responsibility (where an alleged abuser is deceased).

There was relatively little support among survivors for a restorative justice scheme as a response to the revelation of sexual abuse in schools. It is also clear that, in order for a restorative justice response to be safe and effective in the context of child sexual abuse, a number of particular resources and safeguards would have to be put in place. The independent report commissioned by the Scoping Inquiry found that a further feasibility study would be necessary in order to assess this. It is therefore not recommended, at this juncture, that a large-scale restorative justice project be included as part of the government response. However, that is not to say that restorative justice values do not have a role to play, and restorative values such as accountability, respect, survivor-centredness and a focus on repair and healing have informed the Scoping Inquiry's recommendations.

(ii) Child Protection

Child protection is an issue of the utmost importance to survivors. This Report includes an extensive examination of current child protection provisions in schools. We have also appended the expert report of Dr Helen Buckley, commissioned by the Scoping Inquiry, on the development of child protection over the decades since the early 1990s and how the current child protection framework operates in schools.

The Scoping Inquiry is of the view that there is currently a robust child protection structure in place in schools. However, there are a number of areas where this system could be further strengthened, and as noted previously, we recommend that the Department of Education set up an a Child Protection in Schools Group to give effect to the child protection recommendations set out in this report, with the intention that the Group will report to the Commission as to its progress in implementing the measures recommended.

We recommend that the Department of Education set up a Child Protection in Schools Group to carry out the functions set out in paragraph 125 of Chapter 25 of this Report and that there be a review of child safeguarding measures in unrecognised schools to consider current measures and make any recommendations to improve or strengthen same.

F. The Scale of Sexual Abuse That May Emerge

There is reasonable cause to believe that further allegations of sexual abuse in schools will emerge, and that the numbers of allegations will exceed the number recorded in the religious orders' records. This is due to several factors. It seems clear that there is a high level of underreporting of sexual abuse generally. This is reported internationally, but significantly, the Central Statistics Office's ('**CSO**') 2022 Sexual Violence Survey ('**SVS**') shows low levels of reporting of sexual violence, including sexual violence experienced in childhood, particularly amongst men. Men are likely to be the largest group of survivors coming forward to a future commission, given the prevalence of boys' schools associated with allegations of historical sexual abuse as recorded by the religious orders. The CSO asked participants in the survey whether the sexual violence about the location where the sexual violence occurred, including at school.[8] The resulting figures are estimates only and subject to a number of qualifications.[9] In summary, however, the CSO suggest that, in the age cohort of persons aged 35 years and older, some 15,300 men and 26,000 women are estimated to have experienced sexual violence as a child in a school.

Previous inquiries have established that some child sexual abusers were prolific. As there are a large number of alleged abusers recorded, there is a risk that some of these will have affected a greater number of children than the current records suggest.

The overall number of persons coming forward to allege historical sexual abuse in day or boarding schools is likely to increase following the publication of this Report and the further public discussion of this topic which may follow on its publication.

While it seems reasonable to suggest that further allegations of historical sexual abuse will emerge, predicting the scale of the increase is difficult. We have sought, by considering the data of the Sexual Violence Survey carried out by the CSO, to give some indication of how this might translate to overall numbers of the population affected by childhood sexual violence.

8 The SVS data was solely based on the experience that affected the participant the most, and the sexual violence may have been perpetrated in a number of locations. See Chapter 23.

9 The SVS data caveated based on a number of factors, including that it is solely based on the experience that affected the participant the most, and the sexual violence may have been perpetrated in a number of locations. See discussion in Chapter 23.

Given the likely scale of allegations, the Commission may need to use a sampling approach or consider sitting in divisions in order to complete its work in a timely fashion.

We recommend that the Commission be entitled to adopt a sampling approach, if required, to decide what issues it must investigate and the extent of the investigation of same, and may give consideration to sitting in divisions to enable it to complete its work in a timely fashion.

G. The Level and Extent of Co-operation of the Religious Orders with a Future Inquiry

The Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference required us to engage with the religious orders regarding the likely level and extent of their co-operation with a future inquiry. The great majority of the religious orders have indicated that they are, in principle, willing to engage and cooperate with a future inquiry, with the majority saying that they would appear before such an inquiry and provide documents if requested to do so.

Some orders suggested that the level of such cooperation might depend on whether fair procedures are duly observed by such an inquiry. In addition, a number of orders, and in particular the larger orders, indicated that certain procedural protections for witnesses should be in place and, further, that it would be necessary for a future inquiry to have powers of compellability, in order to obviate concerns regarding data protection law and/or obligations of confidentiality.

However, the great majority of orders did not respond to the more specific queries raised by the Scoping Inquiry as to what issues they might be willing to concede, on the basis that they could not respond until they see the terms of reference of a future inquiry. In particular, the religious orders in respect of which there are a significant number of allegations did not respond to these questions for that reason.

The attitude of the religious orders against which there are large numbers of allegations is particularly important to any future inquiry. The religious orders are entitled to rely on their legal and procedural rights before a commission. However, the extent to which they may do so, and the extent to which issues are contested, will be relevant to the likely duration of the commission's work, and to the experience of survivors before such an inquiry, having regard to the need for oral evidence and cross-examination. It is therefore clear that further engagement with the religious orders is advised after the Terms of Reference are fixed by the Government.

H. Conclusion

The Scoping Inquiry team wish to express our appreciation to the many people who have assisted us with our work and who have generously given of their time to assist us. In particular, the Scoping Inquiry is profoundly grateful to everyone who contributed to the Survivor Engagement process. We were deeply affected by the privilege of hearing survivors' accounts of abuse and we do not underestimate how difficult it was for many survivors to participate. We have made every effort to do justice to what survivors have told us and to treat them and their stories with the utmost respect and dignity. We thank each person who came forward to speak to us, and all of those who supported them in doing so.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Schools Run by Religious Orders was established by the Minister for Education on 7 March 2023. It was set up in response to revelations of sexual abuse in schools run by the religious orders and, in particular, following the broadcast of the RTÉ Documentary on One: *Blackrock Boys*[1] on 7 November 2022. The documentary described the accounts of Mark and David Ryan, two survivors of sexual abuse at Blackrock College. The broadcast of the documentary led to others coming forward to report their experiences of sexual abuse in Blackrock College and allegations concerning historical sexual abuse in other schools also emerged.
2. Sadly, Mark Ryan died on 21 September 2023. Not only were Mark and David Ryan's accounts the catalyst to the establishment of the Scoping Inquiry, but many of the survivors who came forward to participate said that they found the courage to do so because of the bravery of the Ryan brothers in speaking about their experiences.[2] Many spoke with sadness at Mark Ryan's passing during their engagement with the Scoping Inquiry, and the Scoping Inquiry team shares their regret that Mark Ryan did not see the outcome of the process that he was so instrumental in establishing.

A. The Terms of Reference – What the Scoping Inquiry Was Asked to Do

3. The Terms of Reference of the Scoping Inquiry[3] require it to provide a report to the Minister for Education that, amongst other things, sets out a potential framework for a Government response to historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders, which could also form a template for Government responses elsewhere.

1 Produced by Liam O'Brien with Seán Mac Giolla Phádraig. It is available at https://www.rte.ie/radio/podcasts/22168257-blackrock-boys/.

2 There are different terms used to describe people who have experienced sexual abuse. We acknowledge that language is important, and many have different views about the terms used. In this report we use the term 'survivor' as that is the language in our Terms of Reference. In chapters reporting what we were told in the Survivor Engagement Process, the term 'participant' is used to indicate survivors who took part in that process.

3 These are set out in Appendix 9.

4. The Terms of Reference set out a series of tasks for the Scoping Inquiry and lists certain considerations that must be borne in mind. The Terms of Reference are included in an appendix to this Report, but for ease of reading, the key tasks assigned to the Scoping Inquiry are to:

   (i) make recommendations on the scope/breadth and sequencing of a response that will, in so far as is possible, best meet outcomes sought by survivors of historical sexual abuse and to suggest Terms of Reference for same;

   (ii) give consideration to child protection and restorative justice initiatives by religious orders;

   (iii) analyse previous domestic inquiries, their methodologies, outcomes achieved, impact on policy and practice, and impact of outcome on survivors and their families;

   (iv) assess the options for an independent inquiry, having regard to the outcomes sought by survivors, the impact of the process on survivors and their families, including the potential for re-traumatisation, the legal issues that may arise, and timeframe and cost;

   (v) have regard to international practice;

   (vi) engage with religious orders to establish the level and extent of their intended co-operation with any proposed inquiry;

   (vii) identify the potential scale of historical sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders in Ireland;

   (viii) commission expert reports on child protection and the restorative justice schemes/supports operated by the religious orders; and,

   (ix) have regard to the potential impact of their considerations and/or report on any criminal prosecution or ongoing Garda investigations.

5. As can be seen from the above, the Scoping Inquiry has a clearly defined scoping function, in terms of being asked to ascertain what survivors want, what the likely attitude of the religious orders is going to be to a future inquiry, to identify the scale of abuse in schools run by religious orders, and to assess what Irish past inquiries as well as international inquiries have to teach us about the best framework for a future process.

6. Additionally, the Scoping Inquiry has some separate, somewhat interrelated, tasks: (i) to examine child protection in schools and identify best practice in this area; (ii) to consider the restorative justice processes/supports offered by religious orders.

7. The Scoping Inquiry's remit included all primary and secondary schools, day or boarding, that are run by, or had been run by, religious orders. In practice, religious orders are, or were, involved in the majority of secondary schools in the country, and a considerable number of primary schools. A general overview of the Irish education system is set out in Chapter 12 and describes in greater detail the schools the Scoping Inquiry considered to be covered by its Terms of Reference. A consideration of the position of special schools is contained in Chapter 13.

8. In this Report we set out the information religious orders gave us about the numbers of complaints of historical sexual abuse made to them in respect of their day and boarding schools. We also set out what survivors say about historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by the religious orders. As a Scoping Inquiry we have no function to investigate, and we have not investigated, the allegations made, or the extent of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by the religious orders. We make no findings of any kind in relation to the veracity of the allegations and complaints made, or the extent of historical sexual abuse in schools run by the religious orders.

B. Extension of Time for Filing of the Scoping Inquiry's Report

9. On its establishment the Scoping Inquiry was to furnish its report by 7 November 2023. Unfortunately, this timeframe was not attainable, and on 5 October 2023 the Minister announced that the date for the submission of the Scoping Inquiry's report had been extended to 7 June 2024.

C. The Survivor Engagement Process

10. The Scoping Inquiry was asked to consult with the survivors of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders, asking them what they wished to see happen next and what steps the Government should take in light of the revelations that had emerged. Designing and implementing the Survivor Engagement process was the Scoping Inquiry's immediate priority upon its establishment. This was particularly so in light of the short timeframe initially envisaged and the fact that much of the Scoping Inquiry's recommendations were to be considered in the light of the survivors' wishes. At the outset, it was necessary to ensure the availability of trauma-informed facilitators to assist in carrying out the process.

11. In addition to designing and implementing the Survivor Engagement process, the Scoping Inquiry had to consider issues such as confidentiality, data protection and reporting obligations as part of the Survivor Engagement process and, where necessary, to advise survivors of these issues accordingly.

12. The Survivor Engagement Report, produced by the Survivor Engagement Team, is set out in the first section of this Report. The details of the design and implementation of the Survivor Engagement process are outlined in Chapter 2. Survivors were invited to register their interest in participating in the Survivor Engagement process on 7 March 2023, and the last formal survivor interview was held on 22 November 2023. It took some time to analyse the considerable volume of information gathered by way of questionnaires, interviews, and written submissions. Chapters 2 to 8 of this Report set out the results of the Survivor Engagement process, looking in turn at the accounts given to us by survivors of their experiences, the impact of those experiences on their lives, and what they wish the Government to do about the revelations of historical child sexual abuse in day and boarding schools. The team is immensely grateful to the survivors who gave so generously of their time and their deeply personal stories, and without whom the Scoping Inquiry could not have achieved its goals.

D. Engagement with the Religious Orders

13. Engagement with religious orders involved two distinct aspects. Firstly, the Scoping Inquiry sought to ascertain the extent and level of cooperation the relevant religious orders would provide to any proposed inquiry, as required by the Terms of Reference. The details of this process are set out in Chapter 24 of this Report.

14. Secondly, the Scoping Inquiry sought information from the religious orders regarding the number of allegations of historical sexual abuse in their schools. The gathering of statistical information from the religious orders was a complex and time-consuming task. The results of this process are set out in Chapter 9. The Scoping Inquiry first had to identify the relevant religious orders that ran schools and then contact each order individually. The Scoping Inquiry issued a number of questionnaires to be completed by the religious orders and their schools. It required considerable time and effort for those religious orders with large numbers of schools, or where the congregation is now small in size or elderly, to respond to the Scoping Inquiry's requests for information. The Scoping Inquiry is grateful for the co-operation and assistance of the religious orders in this regard. Chapter 10 sets out further sources of data on the potential scale of allegations in schools while Chapter 23 considers wider indicators of the likely scale of historical sexual abuse in religious order run schools. Chapter 11 considers what records are held by state and non-state bodies of allegations of historical sexual abuse in religious order run schools.

15. The Scoping Inquiry asked the religious orders whether they would co-operate with a future inquiry by providing their records and attending to give evidence before a future inquiry if necessary. The answers received to this question are set out in Chapter 24 of the Report. That chapter also examines the responses of the religious orders to a letter sent in December 2023 asking in detail about the likely level of co-operation with any proposed inquiry.

E. Interpreting our Terms of Reference

16. The Scoping Inquiry adopted a reasonably broad approach to the interpretation of its Terms of Reference, given that its primary purpose was to scope out the issues that were likely to arise for a future inquiry. The Scoping Inquiry devised a 'Meaning of Terms' document, which was provided to religious orders and various other bodies approached for assistance in order to explain the type of allegations and circumstances that came within its Terms of Reference. The document is set out in full later in this Report,[4] but the following key working definitions should be highlighted:

    (i) The Scoping Inquiry defined the term *'Day or Boarding Schools run by a Religious Order'* as referring to a day or boarding school in the Republic of Ireland, whether a primary or a secondary school, currently or previously run by a religious order. This included special schools and community schools but did not include industrial and reformatory schools. This was a source of great disappointment to a number of survivors of those institutions who contacted the Inquiry. The Scoping Inquiry gave careful consideration to whether industrial and reformatory schools fell within its remit, and ultimately concluded that they did not. Industrial and reformatory schools were state care institutions, established under specific legislation for that purpose. Primary and secondary schools did not fall under that legislation and had been set up under entirely different mechanisms and for different purposes.

    (ii) The term *'Run by a Religious Order'* was taken to include circumstances where the religious order concerned currently or previously ran a school or schools, whether day or boarding, where it is alleged that abuse occurred.

4 Appendix 6.

17. The Scoping Inquiry's analysis of previous domestic inquiries into sexual abuse is prefaced by a consideration of the procedural rights of persons coming before inquiries in Chapter 14. An analysis of the Ferns, Dublin and Cloyne inquiries and the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse ('CICA') is set out in Chapter 15, while the connections between the scope of inquiries and the experience of survivors who appear as witnesses before them is considered in Chapter 16. Chapter 17 surveys a number of relevant international inquiries, while Chapter 18 addresses the research on the impact of inquiry processes on survivors, including the potential for retraumatisation, before considering certain how the scope and extent of an inquiry should be determined in light of these concerns. Chapter 22 surveys certain legal issues that may arise in a future inquiry, including the impact on Garda investigations and the timeframe and cost of a potential inquiry.

F. Expert Reports

18. The Scoping Inquiry commissioned two expert reports. The first, a critical analysis of current child protection systems in schools, was provided by Dr Helen Buckley. Dr Buckley's report is referred to in Chapters 19 and 20 of this Report and set out in full in Appendix 4.

19. The second report, a critical analysis and audit of the response of religious orders to historical sexual abuse allegations by way of Restorative Justice schemes and other initiatives/supports, was provided by the Centre for Effective Services ('CES'). Their report is referred to in Chapter 21 of this Report and set out in full in Appendix 5.

G. Co-operation with the Scoping Inquiry

20. The Scoping Inquiry is a non-statutory inquiry with no power to compel co-operation with its aims. Happily, with very few exceptions, we nonetheless received assistance and co-operation from those we approached.

21. The religious orders, with few exceptions, provided the Scoping Inquiry with all the information that was sought from them. One religious order declined to provide the names of their relevant schools, two provided those details but declined to specify how many allegations of historical sexual abuse and alleged abusers were made in respect of each of those schools. However, those orders did provide information as to their records of the overall number of allegations made in respect of their schools, the number of their schools concerned, and the number and category of alleged abusers in respect of whom the allegations were made.

22. The Scoping Inquiry met with a number of Government departments, statutory bodies, and Non-Governmental Organisations as part of its work in assessing the scale of allegations of historical child sexual abuse and identifying what records exist that might be of interest to a future inquiry. The Scoping Inquiry met with certain bodies, such as An Garda Síochána and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, on several occasions. The details of the records held by Tusla, An Garda Síochána and a number of other public bodies and NGOs regarding sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders are set out in Chapters 10 and 11.

23. Separately, the Scoping Inquiry was assisted in its work by the Data Protection Commission, the Central Statistics Office, and the National Archives. A number of people who had worked on previous inquiries met with the Scoping Inquiry on an informal basis. One in Four provided considerable assistance to the Scoping Inquiry, particularly in the early stages of its work. The Scoping Inquiry met with a number of academics who generously shared their thoughts and research in relation to the impact of inquiries into historical sexual abuse on survivors.[5] The Scoping Inquiry also met with the Papal Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Montemayor, in relation to whether there are records held in the Vatican that might be of interest to a future inquiry. Representatives of the Methodist Church in Ireland, contacted the Scoping Inquiry and met with us for a general discussion on a number of matters of interest to the Inquiry. The religious orders greatly assisted the Scoping Inquiry in providing their records of allegations of historical sexual abuse in respect of their schools. In addition, the NSBCCCI was also of great assistance to the Scoping Inquiry in its work. There are many others who gave generously of their time and expertise to the Scoping Inquiry, contributing greatly to our work. The many people who assisted us are listed in our Acknowledgment section.

H. Conclusion

24. It has been an honour and a privilege to Chair the Scoping Inquiry. Special thanks and acknowledgement must go to the survivors, whose willingness to participate in the Scoping Inquiry was central to our work. The descriptions given by survivors of their experiences makes for distressing, often harrowing, reading. The Scoping Inquiry team wish to express our deep gratitude to survivors and to acknowledge their courage and fortitude in coming forward to speak to us.

5 Dr James Gallen, Prof Anne-Marie McAlinden, Dr Marie Keenan, and Dr Sophie Van der Valk. Two members of the Scoping Inquiry also attended, as observers, a workshop held in Queens University Belfast on 4 September 2023 on 'Transforming Justice Responses to Non Recent Institutional Abuse' which was part of a broader cross-border project examining justice responses to non-recent institutional abuse on the island of Ireland: https://transformingjusticeproject.org.

25. The process of conducting the Inquiry has afforded a unique opportunity to hear from a wide range of people and agencies who contributed to our work.

26. Among the survivors who participated in the Inquiry's process, there are many views and shades of opinion on what should follow the revelations of child sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders. We have endeavoured to reflect the broad range of opinions and suggestions brought to us, and we recognise the complexity and nuances of each survivor's contribution, and in particular their views on the need for inclusivity. Careful and in-depth consideration was given to all of the recommendations made by survivors. Whilst we were not able to include every suggestion in our conclusions, every effort has been made to accurately reflect the overarching priorities of the survivors who spoke to the Scoping Inquiry.

27. This Report sets out the views of survivors about what they wish the Government to do in response to revelations of historical sexual abuse allegations concerning day and boarding schools run by religious orders and the likely scale of such allegations. We hope our recommendations will assist in guiding that response.

Chapter 2:
Introduction to the Survivor Engagement Process and Methodology

A. Introduction

B. Overview of the Survivor Engagement Report

C. Survivor Engagement Process – Acknowledgements

D. Methodology – Design and Implementation of the Survivor Engagement Process

(i) First Stage – Questionnaire

(ii) Questionnaire Responses

E. Second Stage Methodology: Written Submissions and Interviews

(i) Written Submissions

(ii) Interviews

(iii) Principles Underpinning the Process

(a) Choice and Accessibility

(b) Transparency and Control

(c) Respect and Care

(d) Quality

F. Design and Implementation of the Interview Process

(i) Invitation to Interview

(ii) Advance Information

(iii) The Interview

G. Data Management and Security

H. Thematic Analysis of Summary Notes

(i) Finalising Summary Notes

(ii) Coding of the Interviews

A. Introduction

1. From the early 1990s, the Irish public became increasingly aware of the reality of the sexual abuse of children following extensive media coverage of a number of high-profile cases. These were largely stories of sexual abuse in families, and were followed by a series of high-profile cases of clerical sexual abuse from the mid-1990s. These cases of sexual abuse related to a range of settings, including industrial and reformatory schools, which were the subject of the Commission to Investigate Child Abuse (CICA).
2. The broadcast of the RTÉ Documentary on One: Blackrock Boys[1] (7 November 2022) featuring the story of Mark and David Ryan's experiences of sexual abuse brought the issue of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders to the fore and led to the subsequent announcement of the Scoping Inquiry. The Survivor Engagement process is central to the work of the Scoping Inquiry, and its aim is to give voice to survivors in a trauma-informed process.
3. The Survivor Engagement team set out to hear what individual survivors had to say about their experiences of sexual abuse, how it affected them and what they would like the Government to do in response. Over several months, the team gathered information from survivors in questionnaires, interviews, written submissions and other correspondence. This section of the Report of the Scoping Inquiry details the outcomes of that Survivor Engagement process, from Chapter 2 (the present chapter) through to Chapter 8. **We should note that these chapters may be distressing to read as they describe survivors' accounts of sexual abuse, physical violence and references to suicide.** As the process did not have a remit to make findings, the report simply sets out what the Survivor Engagement team has been told by participants.
4. Section D of this chapter outlines the methodology for the Survivor Engagement process the trauma-informed approach taken by the team. It describes the design of the two-stage Survivor Engagement process and how it was established, how survivors were invited to participate, and the steps taken to ensure that they were informed of the process. It underlines the team's priority to ensure the approach was trauma-informed and to endeavour that participants would be treated with the utmost dignity and respect throughout.

1 Produced by Liam O'Brien with Seán Mac Giolla Phadráig.

B. Overview of the Survivor Engagement Report

5. This section provides an overview of the next six chapters:

- Chapter Three – First Stage of the Survivor Engagement Process and Other Contributions: This chapter sets out the information gleaned from the questionnaires completed by participants during the first stage of the Survivor Engagement process. It also contains other contributions and correspondence received from survivors whose experiences could not be included in the main body of the report.
- Chapter Four – Second Stage of the Survivor Engagement Process – Participants' Accounts of What Happened: This chapter describes, in detail, what participants who took part in the second stage of the Survivor Engagement process told us about their experiences of sexual abuse when they were children attending day and boarding schools run by religious orders.
- Chapter Five – Participant Accounts of the Impact of Sexual Abuse on their Childhood and Adolescence: This chapter details participants' descriptions of the effects on their childhood arising from their experiences of sexual abuse.
- Chapter Six – Participant Accounts of the Impact of Child Sexual Abuse on their Adulthood: This chapter describes the ongoing impact of sexual abuse on some participants into their adult lives.
- Chapter Seven– What Participants Want to See Next: This chapter describes the wide range of views that participants expressed on what they would like to see happen as part of a government response to historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders.
- Chapter Eight – Summary of the Survivor Engagement Process: This brings together a summary of what survivors told the team in the Survivor Engagement process.

C. Survivor Engagement Process – Acknowledgements

6. The Survivor Engagement team would like to thank Quality Matters, whose team of trauma-informed facilitators and support staff were central in conducting interviews with participants and providing support for participants throughout the second stage of the process. Their extensive thematic account of the interviews was invaluable to the Survivor Engagement team, and we wish to commend their professionalism and compassion in their work with participants throughout this process.
7. We would also like to acknowledge that there were people who did not participate in the Survivor Engagement process formally, but who provided information in other ways, including conversations and correspondence with the team. Some of this has been included in Chapter 3 in Section C: Other Contributions. Whilst the team was not able to use all of what we were given, we were nonetheless grateful to receive it.
8. The Survivor Engagement team has worked hard to do justice to what we have been told by the men and women who came forward and offered us their stories and views for future action. We wish to acknowledge the bravery and humanity of each of the survivors who trusted us with their accounts and who told us how it has affected their lives and the lives of their families and loved ones. This is especially significant as many participants told us how difficult it is for them to talk about what happened.
9. We wish, in particular, to acknowledge the role of the late Mark Ryan, and his brother David, whose revelations of their experiences of sexual abuse have been instrumental for so many survivors in their decision to speak about their own experiences.
10. We would like to sincerely thank each person who engaged with us, and anyone in their lives who supported them in doing so.

D. Methodology – Design and Implementation of the Survivor Engagement Process

11. This section provides an overview of the stages of the Survivor Engagement process of the Scoping Inquiry. The first stage of the process comprised a questionnaire about participants' experiences and their preferences for participating in a second stage, which would consist of an interview or a written submission if the participant wished to take part in that stage.

(i) First Stage – Questionnaire

12. In the first stage of the Survivor Engagement process, those who had registered their interest in participating were initially sent information about the two-stage process, how it would work and what it hoped to achieve.[2] This information was provided to assist those who had registered to make an informed decision about taking part in the process. Following this, those who had registered were invited to complete a short questionnaire which sought to gather some initial information about experiences of sexual abuse. This would help to begin to build a picture of the nature and scale of sexual abuse that survivors had experienced and would indicate the number of people whose experiences came within the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry, and who were interested in participating in the second stage of the process, thus allowing the team to ensure the availability of trauma-informed facilitators, note-takers and venues for meetings around the country to meet participants' needs.

13. In order to best suit the preferences of each individual participant, the questionnaire was designed to be administered in different formats, including completing the questionnaire online using a secure survey tool; completing a paper copy with a pre-paid addressed envelope provided for return to the Scoping Inquiry; or requesting that a suitably qualified facilitator read through the questionnaire with the participant over the phone and record their answers. All formats were available in both English and Irish.

14. At the outset, participants were provided with information on the nature of the questionnaire and its purpose, and on what would happen to information provided to the Scoping Inquiry. Participants were advised that some of the questions may be sensitive or distressing, and information on support was included. They were asked for their consent to proceed with the questionnaire.

15. In the questionnaire itself, participants were asked how they would like to be contacted as the Survivor Engagement process progressed, and about their current country or county of residence. The questionnaire then asked some initial details about individual experiences of abuse including the type of school attended; whether they were day or boarding pupils; the name of the school; the location and approximate time frame when the abuse occurred; their age when abuse occurred and whether they had been able to tell anyone. Other questions related to next steps in the process, and the preferences for each participant if they chose to continue on to the second stage.

2 See Appendix 2: About the Survivor Engagement Process.

16. Participants had the option of ending their participation at the questionnaire stage, or of progressing to a second stage interview with a trauma-informed facilitator or providing a written submission. Those who opted for an interview could indicate preferences for this to be in-person, online or over the phone. Participants were asked to complete or return their questionnaires within two weeks of issuing, and this was later extended by ten days. Whilst the majority of those participating completed the questionnaires within this timeframe, some people who had not registered or completed the questionnaire in time for various reasons approached the Scoping Inquiry after the timeline outlined. Whilst it was necessary to organise the process to scheduled timelines, the team took the view that where people could be prioritised over process, it would do so on a case-by-case basis. In any case where the team was asked to take individual circumstances into account, inclusion was prioritised where at all possible.

17. Information provided by participants at this point made it possible for the second stage of the process to be flexible and responsive in meeting people's individual requirements for their interviews. This is described in more detail later in this chapter.

(ii) Questionnaire Responses

18. A total of 211 questionnaires were completed. A small number of participants (6) completed the questionnaire twice and so, when duplicates were accounted for, this gave a total of 205 people in the first stage of the survivor engagement process.

19. In reviewing the questionnaires, it was clear from the information provided in some cases that the participant's experience was outside the scope of the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry. The team endeavoured to contact those people directly where possible to explain that, whilst we did not seek to in any way undermine the seriousness of what they had experienced, their particular circumstances were not covered under the Scoping Inquiry's remit and engagement was respectfully concluded at that point. While these individuals did not progress to the second stage, summaries of their main points are included in Section C: Other Contributions in the next chapter (First Stage of the Survivor Engagement Process & Other Contributions). In addition, a small number of participants indicated that they did not wish to progress to the next stage. In total, 182 participants whose experiences potentially fell within the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry indicated that they wished to proceed to the second stage.

20. In the second stage, participants had the option of either giving an interview or making a written submission and could change their method of participation during the process if they wished. Some who had initially indicated that they wished to participate in the second stage did not actually do so. Among the reasons given for this were that some found recalling their experiences too upsetting; some were engaged in legal processes and had decided not to further participate whilst these were ongoing; others felt that they had said all that they needed to in the questionnaire. In other cases, participants did not respond to communications relating to either scheduling their interviews or sending their written submissions. In total, 149 participants whose experiences were within the Scoping Inquiry's remit completed the second stage with either an interview or written submission. Of these, 12 were written submissions and 137 were interviews.

21. Whilst the Survivor Engagement process had advertised deadlines for completion of registration of interest and response to the first stage questionnaire, a small number of individuals made contact after those deadlines had passed, asking to be included. Where it was possible to do so, the team prioritised inclusion, and those people are included in the figures outlined above. A small number of people (less than 5) whose experience would have fallen within the Terms of Reference made contact at a very late stage in the process, where much of the formal analysis had already taken place. It was explained to them that, whilst their accounts could not be included in the formal analysis, the team still wanted to give them a hearing to note any information they wished to provide as part of our overall consideration. A summary of these conversations was checked with the person to ensure accuracy. Their accounts are mentioned separately (see Section C: Other Contributions in the next chapter), and their agreed notes of the conversation are stored alongside those of other participants in the records of the Scoping Inquiry.

E. Second Stage Methodology: Written Submissions and Interviews

(i) Written Submissions

22. Survivors had the option of providing a written submission in the second stage of the process. An optional template was available which provided prompts aligned with the goals of the Survivor Engagement process, and similar to those used in the interviews. These related to what happened to the person as a child; the impact of the abuse on them as a child and as an adult; and their views on a potential Government response to revelations of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders. Participants were not obliged to use the template and could choose to write as brief, or as detailed, a submission as they wished. They could submit by post or by email.

(ii) Interviews

23. This section details the steps taken to conduct the interviews and to develop an overview of the themes raised within the interviews and written submissions.

24. To assist in conducting consultations and interviews with survivors, an organisation called Quality Matters ('QM') was engaged. QM is a social research consultancy which specialises in trauma-informed care in research and project management. The process of engagement with survivors from initial contact through to thematic analysis of findings, was overseen by the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement Lead.

25. QM had extensive experience in conducting interviews of a sensitive nature with people who have faced traumatic experiences in their life. They had an appropriately qualified team of 25 people who conducted and took notes in interviews with survivors. Facilitators who carried out interviews with survivors all had training in trauma informed practice and research, and, at a minimum, a Master's qualification in a relevant discipline such as Social Care, Community Work, Psychology, Psychotherapy or Social Work. The team all had experience conducting interviews with people who have experienced traumatic events, and all had *Children First*[3] training.

26. A note-taker whose role was to take typed summary notes of the conversation was present at each interview. Note-takers had, at a minimum, a degree in a related field and had worked with QM on prior projects in a note taking or similar role. Facilitators and note-takers all underwent additional training both with the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement team and through QM on how to conduct interviews ethically and sensitively. Two clinically qualified members of the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement team also carried out a number of interviews with participants, using the same methodology.

(iii) Principles Underpinning the Process

27. To ensure a trauma informed process, the team worked to four key principles. Together these principles reflect the core tenets of Trauma Informed Practice, which is an approach to service provision that acknowledges the duty of professionals to creatively, and flexibly, provide services that engage and support people who may have had past traumatic experiences.

3 Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs (2017) *Children First – Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children.* Dublin: DCYA.

(a) Choice and Accessibility

28. Choice is a core part of a trauma informed approach and was built into the process. Participants could choose how and when the interview was conducted, as well as how long it would take. A choice of locations around the country was available, with a contribution for travel expenses available to participants. If booked online, participants were provided with a photo and a biography of each facilitator and could choose which facilitator they wanted to work with.

29. Underlining the importance of choice within the process, participants could opt to have their interview notes sent to them, which the vast majority did. They could then decide whether or not they wanted to adapt or add to these notes. Participants could also choose to opt out of the process up until the week before analysis started.

30. The focus on the provision of choice can be seen in the design of the interviews. All interviews were semi-structured which allows for only a small number of formal questions to be asked of each participant. During interviews, facilitators therefore had the ability to follow the interviewee's lead and to encourage them to talk about as much, or as little, as they wanted on the topics they wished to discuss. Gentle prompts were used to help people tell their story; however, the focus was on ensuring that participants always felt in control.

(b) Transparency and Control

31. Where participants had requested, interview summary notes were sent to them, either by email or by post, according to their stated preference. They were then able to delete, add to, or otherwise amend the notes. This step ensured that participants felt that they had control of the way in which their story and views were presented, and it gave them the chance to ensure that what they said was recorded accurately.

(c) Respect and Care

32. The team who worked with survivors were selected for this project based on their experience in working with vulnerable groups and on their proven empathetic, sensitive, and respectful approach to supporting and engaging with people with an experience of trauma. The training given to the team emphasised the importance of engaging with authenticity, flexibility, and attention.

(d) Quality

33. The analysis of key themes, which included a review of over 700 pages of interview summaries and resulted in a thematic analysis, was completed in line with qualitative research standards. This process involved a team of six people. There were several layers of quality assurance embedded throughout the coding, drafting, and editing stages of the process. A key purpose of these quality controls is to manage any possible bias in the selection and write up of themes. The process, which is described in detail within this chapter, means that one person was never solely responsible for deciding whether a quote or theme raised within an interview appears in the thematic analysis. While it is not possible within such a process to have complete objectivity, these checks, balances, and guidelines aim – as far as possible – to reduce bias, make the process as replicable as possible, and, hopefully, result in those who participated feeling that the report reflects their key points and concerns, as well as the tone of what was said. To assist in the unbiased reflection of what participants said, direct quotes and extracts from interview notes have been used throughout the report.

F. Design and Implementation of the Interview Process

34. In consultation with the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement Lead, an interview schedule or set of questions, was developed by QM. Following an introduction at the interview, the schedule was explained to each participant. It included questions on the three key themes that aligned with the goals of the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement process. These themes were:

- The nature and extent of abuse that may have occurred;
- The impact that the abuse had on survivors as a child, and in later life;
- What survivors wanted to see happen next.

35. The introduction to the interview included outlining the objectives of the Survivor Engagement process, as well as detailing how the interview would be conducted. The process by which summary notes would be taken and handled was also explained at this point including information on how notes would be stored and managed. The introduction also included information from the Scoping Inquiry about participation in the case of ongoing legal processes and/or Non-Disclosure Agreements that prospective participants may have entered into in other contexts, outside of the Scoping Inquiry.

36. Participants were asked if they would like to receive and review their notes from the interview and were invited to generate a unique password which would be used to protect their interview notes if sent electronically. The process of what would happen to interview notes was explained; namely how each participant's summary notes would be anonymised and combined with other participants' interview notes to form the report themes. It was explained that names and information that might identify the participant or others would not be included in the summary notes.

37. The facilitator also outlined the supports available for participants, namely three sessions with a psychotherapy service, should participants need immediate support following the recounting of their experiences. Participants were assured that this service was free and confidential.

38. Consent was explained, and participants were informed that they could choose to not answer or to say as little as they wished in response to any question and could pause or stop the interview at any time. Participants were asked if they understood the terms of participation and were happy to provide informed consent to continue.

39. The main body of the interview was designed to ensure participants felt comfortable recounting their experience in as much, or as little, detail as they felt appropriate. The interview asked three key questions, as below, with some prompts commonly used across interviews:

    - What happened? Participants were invited to outline details of any sexual abuse they might have experienced and wished to share with the Scoping Inquiry.
    - What impact did this have on their life? Optional prompts were used to help participants think about the answer to this question in reference to impact on their childhood, adolescence/early adulthood, and then at the present time. Prompts could also be used in relation to how it affected their feelings about themselves, were they able to tell anyone, their relationships with others and their career.
    - What would participants like to see happen next? Participants were provided with a booklet in advance called the *Guide to Potential Government Responses*[4]. During the interview, participants were asked if they had read the booklet and whether they would like the facilitator to go through any of the content with them. They were then asked what, if any, of the options outlined they would like to see implemented from the guide. In the instance that the participant had recommended a type of inquiry, an optional prompt was whether they would participate at such an inquiry in the future. Participants were also asked whether they would like to suggest actions that were not included in the guide.

4 See Appendix 1.

40. The interview closed with a check-in with the participant as to how they were feeling and how they had experienced the interview; a reminder of the supports available; and an expression of genuine appreciation and thanks for their time and trust in the process.

(i) Invitation to Interview

41. Participants could opt to engage in an interview online, in-person, via phone or WhatsApp call. They were also asked if they had any specific needs, which were met when identified. For example, a small number of home visits were provided where this was necessary to facilitate a survivor's participation. In-person interview venues were offered in nine locations throughout Ireland, including Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Wicklow, Kerry, Kilkenny, Westmeath, and Laois which reflected the regions with requests for in-person interviews. When participants choose a time and location, they were sent a confirmation email with the name and a brief profile of their facilitator.

42. In the case of people who did not make contact to request an interview time, follow-up invitations to participate were sent twice from QM and once more by the Survivor Engagement team.

43. The first interviews took place in July 2023 and initially the timeframe for engagement was scheduled to run to the beginning of October 2023. This was extended until the end of November 2023 to facilitate maximum engagement from survivors who had expressed an interest in participating and were not available until that time.

44. Potential participants could contact the QM team via email or phone at any stage during office hours to discuss their needs or to request further assistance. Participants could also contact the Survivor Engagement team by phone or email throughout the process.

(ii) Advance Information

45. Participants who had indicated in the first stage questionnaire that they wished to proceed to an interview were emailed or posted the *Participant Information Booklet.*[5] This outlined the purpose of the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement process, how to engage with it, the information needed to give informed consent, and contact details for the team as well as information on psychological supports available. Participants were also emailed or posted a separate *Guide to Potential Government Responses*[6] with information on some of the potential options for the Government's response to revelations of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders. This booklet was sent by the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement team in the week prior to participants receiving an invitation from QM to book an appointment for their interview.

(iii) The Interview

46. The participant met with the facilitator and a note-taker either in-person, online or by phone. The facilitator introduced themselves, told the participant briefly about their background and experience and then introduced the note-taker and their role.

47. Facilitators engaged with participants in a person-centred and trauma informed manner, being respectful of each participant's unique experience and reactions during the interview. The top priority was to provide as safe and comfortable an environment as possible for participants to tell their story. Reflective and active listening techniques such as paraphrasing, pausing, empathising, and non-directive prompts, such as 'Would you like to add anything else?' were used to facilitate the conversations. Participants were encouraged to speak to the level of detail they wanted, on the topics they wanted to discuss, and were not directed towards topics that they did not raise, except for the prompts identified above.

48. Participants were invited to take breaks if they became upset at any stage and were reminded that they were under no obligation to continue with the process.

49. Interviews took between thirty minutes and over two hours, with most interviews taking at least an hour. Participants were able to engage with the facilitator for as long as was needed. An hour and a half was scheduled for each interview, and extra time was made available, if required.

5 See Appendix 3 – Survivor Engagement Participant Information Booklet.

6 See Appendix 3 – Survivor Engagement Guide to Potential Government Responses.

50. A note-taker took summary notes during the interview in a narrative form which consisted of summary text and direct quotes. Notes were kept of all key points and were edited both to ensure limited repetition and for clarity. Written summaries avoided the use of names. Efforts were made to ensure that accounts recorded in the summary notes were of events that happened directly to participants, or which were observed directly by them. Quotes were recorded which highlighted a particular point in the participants' own words. Note-takers had the option of asking to read out quotes to check for accuracy. A summary of the main topics discussed was given verbally to the participant at the end of the interview.

G. Data Management and Security

51. At the outset of the first stage questionnaire, the Scoping Inquiry's Data Privacy Notice was made available to participants which outlined how data gathered in the Survivor Engagement process would be stored and used. The Data Privacy Notice explained that the Department of Education would be providing administrative support to the Scoping Inquiry and would act as the Data Controller for all data processed for the purpose of conducting the Scoping Inquiry.

52. Participants could complete the questionnaire online using a secure online survey tool. Only Scoping Inquiry team members whose roles required the use of information gathered and stored on this online survey tool had access to it. Participants could also return paper-based questionnaires by post and access to completed hard-copy questionnaires would be restricted to those members of the Scoping Inquiry team whose roles required it. Paper-based files were locked in a room which was only accessible to members of the Scoping Inquiry team, and access to electronic data was restricted to those whose roles required the use of such data, and who had the appropriate credentials to access the relevant data storage. Participants who completed the questionnaire were assigned a unique six-digit Participant ID to protect their identity, and this was used to manage and store information provided by participants in questionnaires and interviews to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

53. In the first stage questionnaires, survivors who indicated that they wished to participate in the second-stage interview were asked if the Scoping Inquiry team could share their information with their trauma-informed facilitator prior to interview. The Scoping Inquiry team provided contact information to QM for those who expressed an interest in participating in a facilitated interview and consented to having their information shared with the facilitators. Data was transferred by encrypted hard drive and the information was stored in a password protected folder in QM's encrypted secure cloud storage facility. To ensure high levels of document protection, when notes were emailed to participants following the interview, unique passwords were used. These unique passwords were generated at the beginning of each interview with the participant, which ensured that only the participant could open the file. Participants could also request that summary notes were sent by registered post.

54. A dedicated email address, which was only accessible to staff directly contacting participants to arrange interviews, was used. A dedicated phone number was also arranged to ensure ease of engagement with the team whilst minimising the number of staff who would deal directly with survivors.

H. Thematic Analysis of Summary Notes

(i) Finalising Summary Notes

55. Almost all participants requested a copy of their summary notes. Participants were asked to review their notes and if they had any corrections, clarifications or changes they wished to make, to return these to the team by email or post (pre-paid envelopes were provided for this purpose). Notes were then stored using participant ID numbers and each was assigned a coding number to further assure confidentiality. A sample of anonymised notes was sent from Quality Matters to the Scoping Inquiry team for review and quality control during the process. Including the written submissions, the views of 149 individuals whose experiences appeared within the Terms of Reference were recorded in the second stage.

(ii) Coding of the Interviews

56. The thematic analysis team at Quality Matters worked in three teams of two people each. There was a team of two for each of the three sections of the interview. Open coding was used to explore and establish initial themes from the summary notes. This involves sorting the interview notes into common categories and identifying common themes. An initial sample of 30 interview notes were open coded by each team. This process established a list of over 90 themes across the three interview sections. This list of early-stage, open coding was then reviewed by another three team members as well as the Survivor Engagement team to ensure that, as far as possible, the themes were inclusive of the issues arising in the interviews. At this stage twelve people reviewed the themes to ensure that no significant themes or issues had been left out of the initial coding.

57. Following initial coding, three teams worked to extract segments from each interview summary under the themes that had been identified as significant. Each team's work was then reviewed. The themes were reviewed again when 25 interviews had been coded, and again when 50 had been coded to ensure that the themes were as reflective as possible of what was said by participants, and that where themes were similar, that they could be combined. Additional reviews checked to see if further thematic headings were required.

58. On completion of the coding, each team began to write the narrative for the thematic analysis. Each theme's section or sub section starts with the more common points and then discusses more specific and less common sub-themes. For a theme to be included in the report it needed to be discussed in at least two interviews. As the thematic analysis was drafted, it was reviewed twice internally by Quality Matters and again by the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement team.

59. Occasionally, minor grammatical edits were made to selected direct quotes and note excerpts used in the report. This was done where there was a spelling or grammatical error or a missing word (e.g., 'to' or 'at'). These minor changes were made to aid reading and did not change the meaning of the sentence.

60. Throughout this report, the voices of survivors are heard in extracts from interview summary notes, and in direct quotes from survivors' conversations with facilitators. In both cases, these are indented as separate paragraphs and are easily identifiable throughout the text. Italics have been used for direct quotes from survivors. Details that might identify a survivor or another person have been omitted.

I. Process Parameters

(i) Qualitative Approach

61. As discussed, to ensure participant choice and control, the facilitation process drew its methodology from good practice for semi-structured qualitative research and was guided by a flexible trauma-informed interview protocol.

62. While facilitators provided some prompts or questions, participants could respond or not, depending on what they chose to disclose during the interview. This meant that participants may have chosen not to discuss certain topics or experiences in the course of the interview. This was taken into account by the team in analysing and reporting on the semi-structured qualitative interviews and the main themes were dealt with by way of a narrative, with few instances of counting the exact number of participants who spoke of an issue or preference. The content of interviews was complex and nuanced, with many overlapping issues and themes for most participants.

63. An example is useful to illustrate the rationale for this. If, for instance, six people had said that they were fearful their sibling may also be at risk of abuse, then stating that 6/149 people or 4% felt this way, would provide a potentially false sense of the findings, as this could be read as indicating that only 4% of people were of this view. However, if all people had been specifically asked if they feared for their siblings (i.e., if it was not semi-structured), the number may be significantly higher.

64. As finding out what survivors want the Government to do in response to historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders is a key aim of the Survivor Engagement process, facilitators endeavoured to ensure that all participants were asked what they would like to see happen from the options outlined in the Guide to Government Responses booklet provided to them. However, they were not required to answer this question; they were not limited to selecting a single response if they chose to answer; and they were not required to select any of the options included. In many instances participants gave examples of what they wanted to see happen next and these did not always align with the options offered to them in the booklet; or included elements of more than one option.

65. The chapters in the report of the Survivor Engagement process, therefore, provide an account of the key themes that emerged from a detailed analysis of the experiences and views of survivors. Whilst a qualitative approach can limit the ability to make definitive statements on the number of people who have had a particular experience or have a specific preference, its inherent strength is the flexibility it affords to ensure a trauma-informed approach that facilitates participants describing their experience and is responsive to survivors' needs.

(ii) Inclusion

66. The challenge of reducing more than 700 pages of summary notes into a report with understandable and accessible themes meant that decisions had to be made in terms of what content would be included and what would be left out. To ensure that this process was as transparent as possible and was not unduly influenced by any one team member's perspective or bias, at many stages at least two people were involved in the decision making or in checking decision making on what themes and which quotes were selected.

67. A general guideline was that any point had to be made by at least two people to be discussed in the thematic analysis. This meant that, on occasion, very detailed recommendations that were unique to one participant were not included in the thematic analysis.

68. Even with these quality checks and processes it is not possible to absolutely confirm that every point made by three or more people is expressed within the thematic analysis. This is because many of the decisions come down to an interpretation of what a sentence or paragraph means. When interpretation is present there is always a possibility that another person may look at the issue slightly differently. However, the report has been developed with as many quality control checks as possible, to ensure that the themes presented in these pages represent, as fully as possible, the experiences and recommendations of the survivors who so generously gave of their time to this process.

J. Chapter Summary

69. This chapter has outlined the design and implementation of the two-stage Survivor Engagement process for the Scoping Inquiry. It has explained the steps that the team took to implement a trauma-informed process in which a priority was to do as much as possible to ensure that participants had access and choice in how they participated, and that the process was trauma-informed. The next chapter begins to set out the information gathered from participants in the process.

Chapter 3:
First Stage of the Survivor Engagement Process & Other Contributions

Content Warning: This chapter contains details of participants' descriptions of sexual abuse, physical violence and reference to suicide. It may be distressing to read.

A. Introduction

1. This chapter sets out the information gathered from participants who were potentially within the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference and who completed a questionnaire. An account of those whose experiences were outside the Terms of Reference is set out in Section C: Other Contributions later in this chapter.
2. The information gathered in this first stage allowed the Survivor Engagement team to implement the second stage, arranging for interviews or written submissions, in line with the preferences outlined by participants. Participants also provided some general information about their experiences as children in schools run by religious orders, and this informed the Scoping Inquiry's broad understanding of the breadth and scale of historical child sexual abuse. A detailed account of the methodology used in the administration of the first stage of the survivor engagement process is set out in the previous chapter.
3. In relation to the information in this chapter, it should be noted that the Scoping Inquiry is not making findings or conclusions based on this information. This chapter reflects the information provided by participants in response to questions about experiences of childhood sexual abuse which they report occurred in day and boarding schools run by religious orders.
4. The Survivor Engagement team, in keeping with its trauma-informed approach, were clear that participants were generally able to offer as much or as little information about their experiences as they wished. The purpose of this stage of the process was to gather initial information to inform the second stage, where participants would have individual opportunities to describe the complexity of their experiences.
5. The Survivor Engagement team's aim was to ensure that participants could determine what information they provided and how they provided it, and to respect their agency in doing so. Therefore, not all participants provided the same amount of information in response to questions, and in some instances, did not provide any response to some questions in the questionnaire. The information set out in this chapter is indicative of the responses provided on questionnaires. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 outline the details and views expressed in the course of one-to-one interviews and submissions where the complexity of individual experiences could be dealt with more fully.

6. It was evident from some questionnaires that a small number of participants' experiences were not within the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry. As explained in the previous chapter, the team made efforts to contact these people individually to explain why their particular circumstances were outside the remit of the Survivor Engagement process. While these individuals did not progress to the second stage, it was important that the seriousness of their experiences, their efforts and their contributions to the process were acknowledged. As such, summaries of their main points are included in Section C: Other Contributions later in this chapter.
7. Where the information provided in the questionnaire was insufficient to determine if a participant's experiences were within the Terms of Reference, the team included the individual until further information was available to determine where the person's experiences should be included, whether within the main body of the accounts of survivors, or in Section C: Other Contributions. As noted in the previous chapter, 211 questionnaires were completed. A small number of participants (6) completed the questionnaire twice and these were amalgamated for each participant concerned. When duplicate and evidently out-of-scope questionnaires were removed, a total of 182 questionnaires were considered and those who indicated that they wished to progress to the second stage of the process were contacted as described in the previous chapter.

B. Information from the First Stage Questionnaires

8. The key priority for the Survivor Engagement team was, at all times, to facilitate participation for survivors of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders as much as possible. It was also important that participants had choice and agency in how they took part in the process. In the first stage questionnaire, survivors were asked to indicate if they wished to participate in a second stage, and to outline their preferences for doing so. They were given the options of speaking to a trauma-informed facilitator or making a written submission. The questionnaire also sought participants' preferences for in-person or online/phone conversations and asked people to indicate where they were located. The answers to these questions were instrumental in ensuring the availability of the required number of trauma-informed facilitators and note-takers for the second stage, along with logistical matters including ensuring availability of appropriate venues for meetings around the country and providing as much choice for participants as possible.

9. The Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference sought to establish the views of survivors of historical child sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders, including both private fee-paying schools and schools in the free education scheme. A national advertisement campaign, and the Scoping Inquiry's website, invited people who had experienced sexual abuse in such schools to register their interest in participating, and the announcement of the commencement of the work of the Scoping Inquiry was covered in national news media. The Department of Foreign Affairs assisted with providing information on the call for registration of interest through the Irish embassy networks to members of the diaspora. In some instances, coverage in the news media referred to the Scoping Inquiry as relating to private schools run by religious orders, which may have inadvertently created an impression that only such schools were included. However, the Survivor Engagement team heard from a large number of pupils who had attended schools in the free education scheme. Some responses were from participants who attended schools run by female religious orders, but these were very much in the minority. The team treated all responses with equal consideration.

(i) Profile of Survivors

10. The overwhelming majority of participants were male (approximately 95 per cent), and there was a small number of responses from female survivors. Most were currently based in Ireland but a further 14 countries were named as current places of residence.

11. The majority of participants had attended a day school (including those who had attended a boarding school as a day pupil), with approximately one quarter of respondents having attended school as a boarder. A smaller number had attended as a day and a boarding pupil at different times.

12. Descriptions of experiences of sexual abuse were spread evenly across primary and secondary schools. A number of people reported that they had experienced sexual abuse in both primary and secondary school, in some cases run by the same religious order.

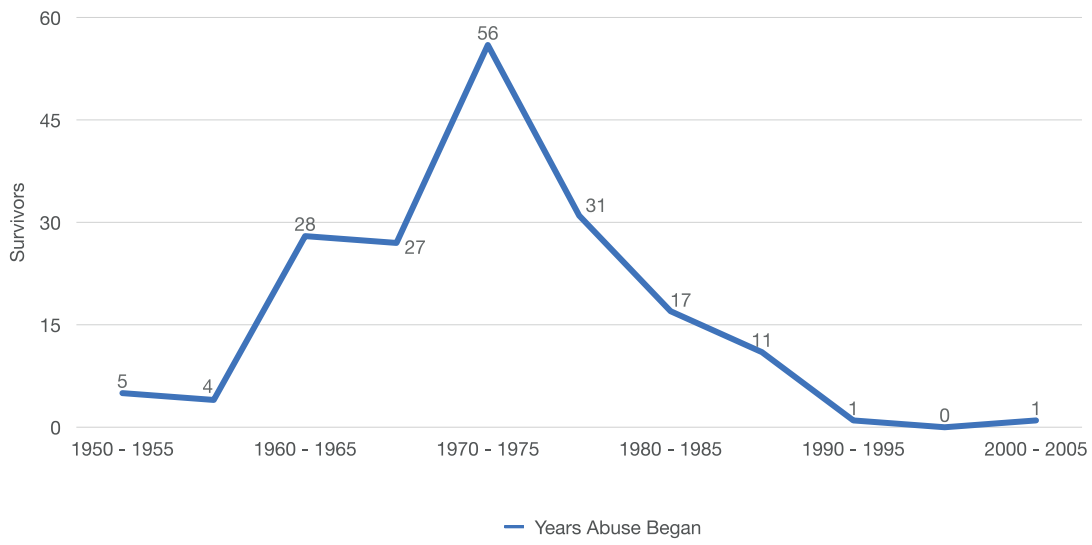
13. A small majority of participants reported that they experienced abuse between the ages of 11 and 15. A large minority of respondents reported that they experienced abuse aged 10 or under, and a small minority reported that they experienced abuse at the age of 16 or over. However, many participants described experiencing abuse in more than one age category.

(ii) Information Regarding Sexual Abuse Reported by Participants

14. The first stage questionnaire sought initial information from participants. Themes raised here are then explored in considerable detail in the next chapter, which reports the accounts given by participants in the second stage, primarily in interviews, or in some cases, in written submissions.

15. The majority of participants who completed the questionnaire reported that they were sexually abused in the 1960s and 1970s, with the peak occurring between 1970[1] and 1975 followed by a steady decline in reported instances of sexual abuse. There was some variance in how participants answered this question, with some naming specific dates whilst others indicated a particular year or a broader period (such as 'early 60s'). In some cases, this may have been because some participants experienced abuse as a single isolated event whilst for others, abuse continued over a number of years. The information was organised in five-year intervals according to the first date given for when the abuse began, as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 - Year When Abuse Began



16. While there was no specific question on how long abuse continued for, some participants provided information suggesting that it had occurred over a number of years.

17. The majority of participants reported that they were sexually abused on the school grounds/premises, with a minority reporting that the abuse had occurred away from the school grounds.

1 Free secondary education was introduced in 1967, leading to a major increase in the number of students attending secondary schools.

18. Some participants provided further information on the circumstances where sexual abuse had occurred away from the schools, and these included school activities such as tours, excursions or sports; in priests' or teachers' residences; and in the participants' own family home. Some of those who reported a location other than the school grounds as the site of their abuse said that they had also been sexually abused in the school.

19. Participants were asked to identify which of the following categories best described the role of the person or people responsible for the sexual abuse that they described in their school: teaching member of staff; non-teaching staff member; pupil; other. A clear majority of participants reported that they were sexually abused by a teaching member of staff and a minority reported that they were abused by a non-teaching staff member. A small minority reported abuse from another pupil, and some selected 'other'. Many participants indicated more than one category, i.e. that they were sexually abused by more than one person, and in later interviews more participants said that they had been abused by more than one abuser within the same category. Where 'other' was selected, some provided information on the role of the person who sexually abused them. This included onsite staff with roles such as caretaker or janitorial staff, chef, sports coach, clinical staff, visiting clergy and others from outside the school.

20. Participants were also asked if, to their knowledge, the sexual abuse that they experienced has ever been reported at any time since the abuse occurred to the present day and were asked to select from the following categories: An Garda Síochána; the Child and Family Agency ('Tusla') or a local health board (Tusla was established in 2014 and took on the functions of the HSE and previously the Health Boards); a person in authority in the school or religious order; or other. A minority reported that the abuse had not been reported to anyone.[2] For participants who have reported what happened to them, the most commonly selected option was An Garda Síochána followed by a person in authority in the school or religious order. A minority said that their experience had been reported to Tulsa or the Health Service Executive ('HSE')/Health Board. For those who selected 'other', some provided information on who they had reported to, including healthcare professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors; support services; legal professionals including solicitors/law firms; and representatives of the Catholic Church other than the religious order who ran their school.

2 All cases brought to the attention of the Scoping Inquiry have been notified to Tusla in compliance with Children First.

(iii) Schools Run by Religious Orders Where Abuse Was Reported to Have Occurred

21. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the Scoping Inquiry is reporting the information provided by participants and it is not drawing conclusions or making findings on this information.

22. Participants were asked the names of the schools where they reported experiencing sexual abuse and the name of the religious order which ran the school. In a small number of cases, participants did not provide the full name of the school, or in some instances, gave the school name but not the name of the religious order. There may be reasons for this, including uncertainty about details, or restrictions as a result of current or past legal processes.

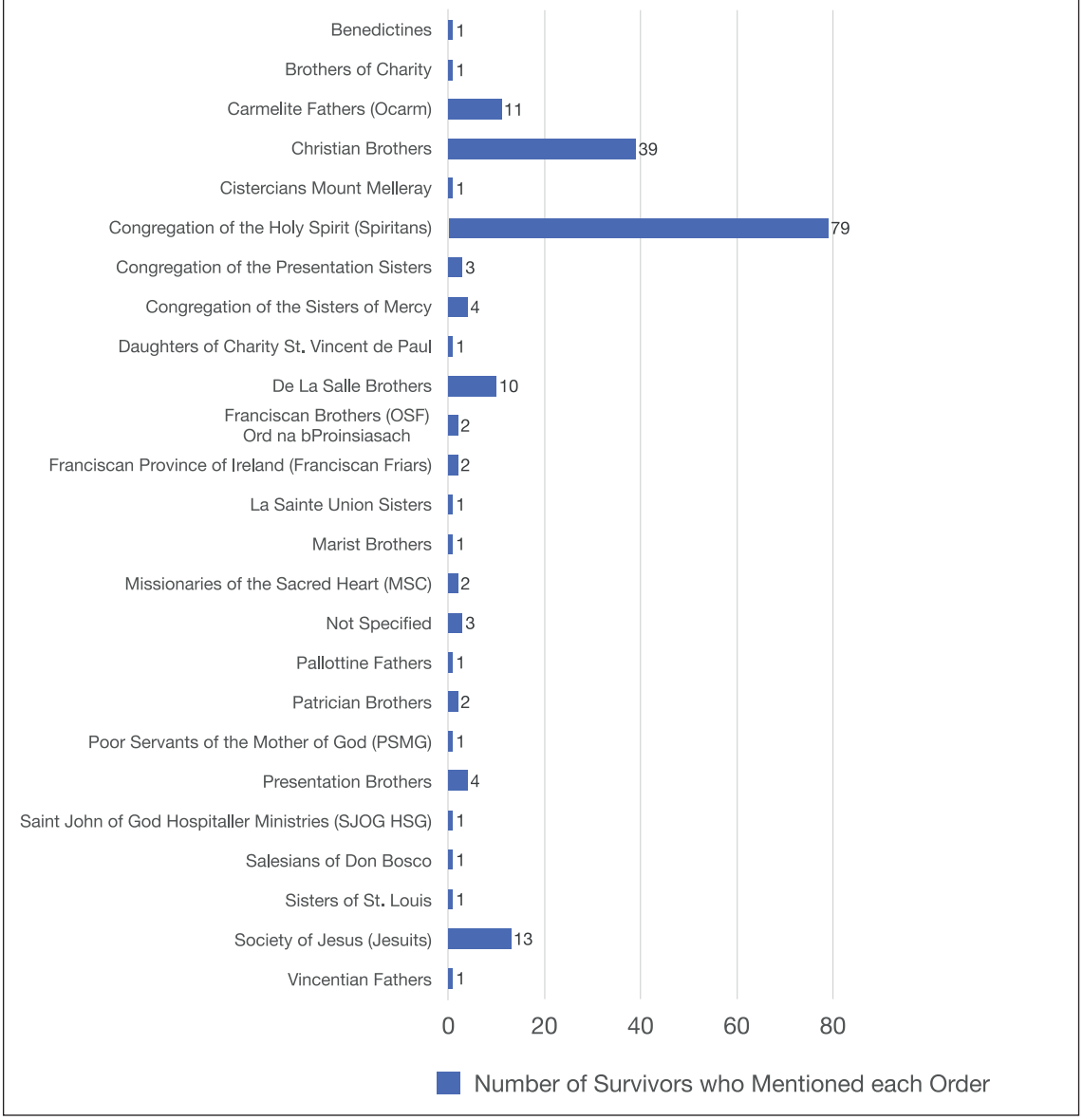
23. The names of schools where participants said that they were sexually abused are listed in Appendix 10. Some of the schools may have closed, moved, amalgamated with other schools or changed their names in the years since the participant attended. The names and locations of schools are set out as they were relayed by participants in their questionnaires. It is possible that some schools may appear on this list more than once, for instance by its Irish and English name, or by a colloquial or formal name as they are recorded in Appendix 10 as reported by participants. Where a participant's school was later identified as being outside the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry, that school has not been included and the information provided by the participant has been accounted for in Section C: Other Contributions later in this chapter.

24. Participants named over 80 schools in at least 22 counties, with a broadly even split between primary and secondary schools. Four special schools run by religious orders were included. A significant number of schools were named by just one participant, and it is possible there may have been more than one person affected by sexual abuse in that school. The information provided to the Scoping Inquiry in other workstreams would seem to indicate this possibility.

25. Participants were also asked the name of the religious order which ran the school where they reported experiencing sexual abuse. A list of 24 religious orders that were named by participants is set out below. Some orders were named by one participant, and others were named by a significant number of participants. The five most frequently cited orders were the Spiritans (Holy Ghost Fathers); the Christian Brothers; the Society of Jesus (Jesuits); the Carmelite Fathers; and the De La Salle Brothers. This is illustrated in the chart below, along with the other named orders.

26. A small number did not specify the name of the religious order, and this may be related to uncertainty as to the name, or it may be due to restrictions related to current or past legal processes. It should be noted that the total number of participants on this chart is higher than the total number who completed questionnaires as some participants reported that they experienced sexual abuse in more than one school run by different orders and so they have named more than one religious order. Some orders ran a number of schools and there are participants who said that they experienced sexual abuse in more than one school run by a particular order (this is most commonly where an order ran a junior/primary and a related secondary school). The table below sets out the orders as named by participants as running their schools, many of which have now closed, amalgamated or transferred to trusts or other structures. As such, the list shows what was reported by participants in the questionnaires and can be understood to be the circumstances in place at the time of participants' school days.

Religious Orders Identified by Participants as Running The School Where They Said They Experienced Sexual Abuse and Number of Instances Where Each Order Was Named



C. Other Contributions

27. The report of the Survivor Engagement process is based on accounts of the information gathered from questionnaires and interviews from those who reported historical child sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders. Additionally, information was provided by people who could not be included in the main report of the Survivor Engagement process. This included people who reported experiencing abuse that fell outside the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry; people who chose not to take part in the Survivor Engagement process but who provided information through other channels; and people who approached the Survivor Engagement team at a very late stage in the process of the Scoping Inquiry and whose information was relevant but could not easily be included in the main body of the report. This section summarises some of what those people told us, taking account of the reports of approximately 30 people.

(i) Reports of Experiences Outside the Terms of Reference of the Scoping Inquiry

28. The Survivor Engagement team heard from a number of people who wished to participate in the Scoping Inquiry but whose reports or accounts of abuse fell outside its Terms of Reference. The team reviewed the information they provided, whether in questionnaires or correspondence, and endeavoured to contact each person to explain why they could not be included. Many said that they nonetheless wished to make the Survivor Engagement team aware of their experience of sexual and/or physical abuse as children in schools and institutions. Their accounts are included here in recognition of the seriousness of what they described happening to them, and in appreciation for their contribution; but as these were beyond the remit of the Scoping Inquiry, they have not been reflected in participant information presented elsewhere in the report.

29. Included here are those who described being sexually abused in schools that were not run by religious orders, for example, diocesan schools, vocational schools, private schools and national schools run by organisations other than religious orders. Others gave accounts of very serious physical abuse in schools, including those run by religious orders, and a few people came forward to say that, whilst they had not been sexually abused themselves, they had been aware of sexual abuse of others, or they suspected that a family member may have been abused. These accounts also provided further insight into such events and its impact on child witnesses. The Survivor Engagement team also heard from people who said that they had been sexually abused in schools outside of the Republic of Ireland or by a member of a religious order or diocesan priest outside a school context.

30. Some of those whose descriptions of abuse were outside of the remit of the Scoping Inquiry gave accounts of abuse in a reformatory or industrial school or residential institution such as an orphanage.

(ii) Culture of Physical Violence and Humiliation

31. Many of this group spoke of their experience of physical violence in the course of their school life. They described it as being pervasive, unpredictable, painful and normalised as part of the daily routine. Regimes of physical violence were described, far exceeding what might have been considered at the time to be acceptable corporal punishment, including the use of implements such as modified leather straps, wooden sticks and knuckle-dusters. Survivors spoke of a climate of fear. One person said that boys who avoided sexual abuse or complained to their parents about sexual abuse were subject to excessive physical violence.

32. One person reported that he was knocked unconscious and still suffers the physical impact of his injury. Some spoke of long-term cognitive difficulties, and one person described life-long problems with his spine and posture as a result of physical violence. Descriptions of extreme physical violence were given, including from a survivor who contacted the Survivor Engagement team to say that he witnessed violence that he believes to have led to the death of another child and this was investigated by An Garda Síochána. Another said his mother had gone to the school to say her son was not to be beaten but it had no effect. Others outlined behaviours they believed were intended to deliberately humiliate children in front of their peers. Another described his school as having a culture of sadism and cruelty and questioned the motivation of those who worked there. Another survivor spoke of his belief that the physical violence was sexually motivated.

(iii) Accounts of Sexual Abuse

33. For those who described sexual abuse that fell outside the scope of the Survivor Engagement process, the impact they described on them as children and later in life is very similar to the accounts provided elsewhere in this report. Reports of sexual assault and rape were relayed to the team. Survivors spoke of experiencing sexual abuse that occurred in settings other than schools and they described how those responsible included clergy, members of religious orders and lay people. These settings included church activities such as preparation for altar boy duties; in a school that was not run by a religious order; on a school tour; in their own home; in a medical setting; and by staff in industrial and reformatory schools. An account of sexual abuse by an older boy was also given.

34. Other participants, whose accounts of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders were relayed to us at a late stage in the process, described incidents of sexual abuse including under the guise of assisting a child with an injury; another reported sexual abuse over a prolonged period in which the child was repeatedly driven to a hotel near their school and said that some form of inhalant substance was used to render them unconscious.

35. The short-term and long-term impact of the sexual abuse was reported to have been significant. Several people spoke of leaving school prematurely and the detrimental impact of this on their education and subsequent employment. Others described drinking harmfully from a young age to numb feelings of shame and despair; the use of drugs; disordered eating; problems with relationships; criminal convictions and suicide attempts. Some gave accounts that their experience of sexual abuse was an isolated assault while others reported it as an ongoing trauma in their childhood. Survivors spoke of far-reaching effects including one person who described attending a parent's funeral only to find that the person who he said had abused him was buried in a plot near to that of his parent in the cemetery. He said that, as a result, he finds himself unable to visit his family's grave. Others spoke of life-long struggles with mental health and how their experiences had impacted on their relationships with their own children in later life.

(iv) Accounts of Grooming

36. One person reported the long-term effect of the damaging impact of grooming over a very long period, including sexual abuse being described as a secret and 'special relationship'. In this instance the participant reported that as a young adult he described this 'relationship' to a friend who named it for what it was: sexual abuse. He said that it was only at this point that he understood what had actually happened. Another gave an account of meeting a teacher when he was a young boy, and this teacher seemed to really like children, at a time when adults were not always interested in what children had to say. The participant said that as a young boy, he had really liked this teacher, and then reported that this teacher later went on to sexually abuse him when he was a pupil in the teacher's secondary school. He said that he recognises now that the earlier friendship was part of a grooming process.

(v) Accounts of Witnessing Sexual Abuse and Difficulties in Disclosing

37. Some people who contacted the Scoping Inquiry wanted to explain that, although they had not themselves been sexually abused, they reported that there was a sexually charged atmosphere in their school and they spoke of being aware that other children were being sexually abused. They described 'jokes' and warnings from other boys about certain priests or teachers and places to avoid in the school. They said that this was still acknowledged years later when, as adults, they attended class reunions or spoke to former classmates. Some said they wanted to confirm that they had witnessed or been aware of sexual abuse in certain schools and that they had experienced a culture of physical violence and fear. Another person described being aware of inappropriate behaviour by a priest when with a friend, and later said this friend was raped. One participant said that he is aware of severe addictions and suicides of men who he suspects were sexually abused as children in his school.

38. Some people described at length the difficulties in telling anybody about the sexual abuse. One man, in describing why he did not tell, said the priest knew something else about him which he did not want his parents to discover, and this was used as a threat. Others said they were too scared to tell as they had been threatened of worse consequences, or of expulsion from school. One said that he was picked on as his parents were separated and had no or little contact with the school. Another said he did tell but nothing changed. One person told a parent who reported the matter to the school and the priest was moved for a short time, but later returned.

39. The views of survivors who were not within the Scoping Inquiry's Terms of Reference were broadly similar to those expressed by the survivors whose views are set out in the following chapters. Some said that the scope of any future process should not be limited to only day and boarding schools run by religious orders. Others said that if there was to be a redress scheme in the future, it should include those who had been resident in industrial or reformatory schools but who had not received redress under previous processes.

D. Chapter Summary

40. This chapter sets out the information provided by survivors in this first stage of the Survivor Engagement process. Whilst both male and female survivors participated, the overwhelming majority of those who took part were male, and attended schools run by male religious orders. The few female survivors who reported sexual abuse in their religious-run schools mainly reported that visiting clerics or other males were responsible. Participants reported that sexual abuse took place in day and boarding schools; they said that it was perpetrated by teachers, non-teaching staff and outside visitors to schools; they described how it took place primarily on school grounds but also in situations outside of schools including on tours, at sports events and in private residences; they reported that sexual abuse occurred in primary, junior, special and secondary schools; they reported that sexual abuse took place across at least 22 counties and in schools run by at least 24 religious orders.

41. Participants spoke of abuse in a wide range of schools. Some schools and some religious orders were named by just one participant whilst others were named by dozens of participants as set out in Appendix 10. Of the religious orders named by participants as having run the schools where they report sexual abuse, the most frequently cited were the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost Fathers), the Christian Brothers, The Society of Jesus (Jesuits), the Carmelite Fathers and the De La Salle Brothers.

42. The chapter also includes the contributions of people who approached the Scoping Inquiry with a wish to share their experiences which, for various reasons as outlined above, could not be included in the main analysis.

43. The Survivor Engagement team wishes to acknowledge that the accounts of those who have been included in Section C: Other Contributions were no less important or traumatic, and the contribution that those survivors made to the process and to our overall understanding is sincerely appreciated.

44. Following the first stage of the Survivor Engagement process, those who had indicated a wish to proceed to the second stage were invited to participate in an interview with a trauma-informed facilitator or to provide a written submission according to the preferences they had indicated in the first stage. The next chapters set out the information that participants provided in the second stage, starting with participants' accounts of what happened to them as children.

Chapter 4:
Second Stage of the Survivor Engagement Process – Participants' Accounts of What Happened

Content Warning: This chapter contains details of participants' descriptions of sexual abuse, physical violence and references to suicide. It may be distressing to read.

E. Children Disclosing Abuse

(i) Non-Disclosure – Why Many Children Did Not Tell

(ii) Intimidation and Silencing of Children

(iii) Disclosure – When Children Told and Were Believed

F. Perceptions of a Culture of Cover-Up and Collusion

(i) Cover-up

(ii) Leadership Inaction

(iii) Perceptions of Collusion Relating to Sexual Abuse

(iv) Transfers of Staff Between Schools and Countries

G. Cultural Issues and Sexual Abuse

(i) Influential Position of the Catholic Church

(ii) Hyper-masculinity and Bullying

H. Violence in Schools

(i) Violence and School Culture

(ii) Punishment and Humiliation in Schools

(iii) Descriptions of Violent Assault of Children

I. Chapter Summary

A. Introduction

1. This chapter outlines participants' descriptions of their experiences of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders. For some participants, this was the first time they had spoken about their experiences. Others had been able to speak about their experiences before now, often after attending counselling or other support. For most participants, discussing these events is difficult, and still often associated with feelings of shame. This is in keeping with the findings of investigations and research, nationally and internationally[1]. In recognition of this challenge and as part of the Survivor Engagement process's trauma-informed approach, participants were informed at the beginning of the interview that they could choose how much or how little they would share about their experiences. Some participants opted to share limited information, while others discussed their experiences in detail. The goal of participating was different for everyone but could be summarised as wanting to shine a light on dark experiences, and to support a process that they hoped would result in more accountability. Many also expressed the hope that attention given to what occurred would help ensure that it could never happen again.
2. As outlined in Chapter 2 – Survivor Engagement Introduction and Methodology, interviews were semi-structured, meaning that only a small number of set questions were asked of all participants, and participants could choose not to answer those questions. Trauma-informed facilitators used prompts based on the points that participants wished to discuss and on the goals of the Survivor Engagement process. This qualitative approach and its framework are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.
3. A number of participants spoke about the RTÉ Documentary on One: Blackrock Boys programme and subsequent media focus in 2022 as the catalyst for them being able to speak about their own experiences and engage with the Scoping Inquiry. Some dedicated their accounts to the late Mark Ryan, who was featured in the documentary and who sadly died while these interviews were in progress, in recognition of his pioneering role in this process.

1 Mc Gee, H.; Garavan, R.; de Barra, M.; Byrne, J.; & Conroy, R. *The SAVI report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland* (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, 2002). https://doi.org/10.25419/rcsi.10770797.v2

(i) Participants' Voices

4. Summary notes, including some direct quotes, were taken at each participant's interview and participants had the opportunity after the interview to review the notes and to add, change or delete information as they wished. Extracts and quotes from those agreed notes are used throughout this chapter to illustrate the key themes raised. Both direct verbatim quotes (in italics) and summary information from interview notes (indented) are used. The quotes and extracts from interview notes are anonymised and care has been taken to ensure that, whilst individual participants may recognise their own voices, we have not included names or details that could potentially identify the participant or any other person. Chapters 4-7 draw on interviews and written submissions from 149 participants.

5. The chapter sets out what has been said to the Scoping Inquiry by the participants and does not make any conclusions or findings, it is simply recording and sharing their experiences.

B. Descriptions of Sexual Abuse in Schools

6. This chapter outlines the common themes described by the participants who chose to give details in their interviews about what they experienced as children in school. The accounts given include all school-going ages, from junior infants to sixth year in secondary school. Participants gave accounts of abuse occurring in day and boarding schools, and in various locations, with some describing abuse occurring in front of other children. The circumstances in which they described sexual abuse occurring included descriptions of physical restraint, incapacitation and physical violence.

(i) Sexual Abuse in Classrooms Where Other Children Were Present

7. Participants spoke about the locations where sexual abuse occurred and many reported that it had happened in classrooms, often with other children present at the time.

> *'He'd get through as many of us as he could at a time. He abused us in front of each other.' (Participant)*

8. Participants described how some teachers and other persons concerned made little effort to hide their actions from other students or teachers.

> The participant described that the abuse occurred in the classroom, in front of other students. He recalled how he was pinned down by his teacher, with others around. *(Participant)*

The participant emphasised that he knows that the school principal was aware of the acts of his colleagues and was even in class with them while he or others were being abused or raped. The principal would open the door, see the abuse taking place, even rape in progress, and just close the door again. *(Participant)*

The participant detailed a particular account of abuse which occurred while he was around 12 years old. A lay teacher digitally sexually assaulted one boy in an aggressive manner, who protested, and then went around the class and sexually assaulted a number of students in front of the rest of the class, including the participant. The participant detailed the smell from the teacher's hand following the incident. The teacher then went on to teach the class as if nothing had happened. *(Participant)*

9. Participants described incidents occurring in the presence or sight of other people or pupils and the ways in which attempts were made to conceal what was happening. Participants reported that common strategies during class included sitting beside or next to pupils, standing behind them or leaning against their desk.

   The participant recalled one of those teachers rubbing his crotch on the corner of the participant's desk with an erection, as if this was *'perfectly normal everyday behaviour.' (Participant)*

10. Some participants described how students were called up to the teacher's desk, where the student would be told to sit on the teacher's lap while completing some tasks or would be pinned to the desk by the teacher's body:

    'What would happen is the Brother, and principal of the school, would, in front of the class, ask one of the boys to go to the top of the class and eventually sit him on his knee. There he would put his hands up and down the boy's leg moving from the upper thigh to beneath the short trousers'. (Participant)

    'There was an organ, or piano or something, that blocked the view from the rest of the class, as he touched me, my genitals, he also was sadistic.' (Participant)

    The participant did anything they asked him to do because he was terrified. There was a gap in the old-style desks at the top of the classroom where the priests sat – this is where he abused the participant. It was done when other students were there but was hidden from their view. *(Participant)*

11. Several participants described how Brothers or priests would use their clothing to disguise what was happening:

> The teacher then whispered, *'You obey me'* and with that, opened the participant's trousers and pushed himself between his knees to massage his testicles while masturbating under his cloak. *(Participant)*
>
> The priest would carry out abuse in plain sight in the classroom. The priest would lift his clothing over the head of the participant to hide them from the rest of the class and lick and kiss his ear. The priest did it to multiple students. *(Participant)*
>
> *'He would put his left hand up my pants and fondle my genitalia, and I think his right hand was up inside his gown and I think he was masturbating.' (Participant)*

12. Some participants recalled feeling smothered and overpowered as the sexual abuse they described took place in the classroom, which they were unable to leave. One participant recounted an experience in class:

> *'The priest approached me from the right. He stood close to me, his lower hip area against my right side. He leaned over me and put his left hand across my back and onto my shoulder. His right hand came in from the right to point out the question. He read out the question, and he asked the rest of the class if they had found the answer: they said, 'Yes Father'. Sr [Name] was also reading out the question and the answer. The priest's reading became mumbled as he raised his right hand from the book, caught my left breast and started squeezing it. At the same time, his left hand tightened on my left shoulder pulling me close to him. He had his mouth close to my ear. The mumbling stopped as his breathing got faster; he was shivering. I could feel it, and he was squeezing me too tight. His hip area was pressed hard against my side.' (Participant)*

13. Some participants reported that classmates were given strict instructions or threatened with physical punishment, to keep them focused on their schoolwork whilst a classmate was sexually abused during class:

> *'We were all forced to read with our heads facing down towards the desk and then his hands were all over us.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I don't understand how Brother X managed to do it. While this abuse was going on, there was a guy sitting next to me on the same bench. When you were told to put your head in the book, and do your work, you did it. The logical part of me says he must have done it to someone else too. But the result of the Garda inquiry said that I was the only one that had reported him.' (Participant)*

14. Other participants described the experience of being digitally penetrated in full view of the class. Participants described being molested by the placing of hands down the back of their clothing, into their pants, shorts or trousers and fondling or squeezing their genitals or masturbating them, in some cases while the teacher or person concerned masturbated themselves. Participants spoke about the abject horror and fear they felt:

    'I had difficulty breathing, I thought I was asphyxiating, just terrible, terrible fear and fright.' (Participant)

    The participant reported that during this event, it was like he froze in time. *'I was afraid I was going to pee in his hands.' (Participant)*

15. Others spoke about the consequences of trying to prevent further sexual assault by wearing tight clothing:

    One day the participant wore extra pants to school to make it more difficult for the abuser to access his body. The abuser went *'berserk'* and punched and kicked the participant. *(Participant)*

16. Some participants reported that regular and systematic abuse took place in their classroom:

    'It was certainly, maybe, a couple of times a week. It was in the middle of a classroom of fellow children.' (Participant)

    'Not always me, but someone was abused every day. Everyone was abused two to three times a year.' (Participant)

    'When new books came in, [to the library] he would have us put plastic on them. He would stand behind you as you were doing that, pushing up against you. That went on when I was older. That was a much milder form of abuse.' (Participant)

17. Some spoke about a cycle of fear of being abused and then relief if it did not happen, which was endured repeatedly, sometimes over many years.

    'When it happened on Monday and Tuesday you knew you were lucky because that meant you were off Wednesday and Thursday. But you were probably back on for the Friday […] It felt like a monster behind you.' (Participant)

18. A participant reported an incident which occurred in front of family members.

> The participant tells of one incident where her sister and mother were collecting her from school, and he came down the stairs with his hands down her skirt. Her sister commented that it looked strange. She had no idea what was happening as these were *'situations you had no preparation for.' (Participant)*

19. Participants reported that standing out in any way could make a child a target. This could be as simple as sitting at the front or back of the class, or being considered academically smart, or conversely, struggling with schoolwork.

> *'The abuser was an evil man. Any of the boys sitting along the front of the class, he used to sit with his legs between theirs and put his hand up their pants.' (Participant)*

(ii) Sexual Abuse Where Other Children Were Not Present

20. Many participants reported sexual abuse when they were alone or isolated, and described the pretexts that were used to put them in that situation. These included: being kept after class for some reason, or frequently for one-to-one practice or tutoring sessions, in classrooms, residential quarters or common areas. Often, the pretext might include something that was a particular interest for the child, such as sports, music, reading, swimming or drama practice. Participants described incidents which occurred in various locations including churches and sports facilities.

> The participant described what happened on being brought to the Brother's rooms. He said: *'He put me on top of his lap and started fondling me. I don't know what happened but very quickly I was down between his legs, in front of his body. I can remember the black material of his pants'.* He then described in considerable detail the Brother's trousers, recalling a creamy white lining, white buttons on the inside and black buttons on the outside, and a type of underpants made of long white material. He continued: *'I remember, and I feel sort of a sick reflux, when I think of this, even now, his grey pubes.' (Participant)*
>
> *'He had me come down and practice reading the lessons in his bedroom. This was a standout moment: that you would be able to go into his room and not to be stopped as a 12-year-old boy. He would have you in the bedroom, and he would sit next to you on the bed. It would have been about April or May, and I was wearing shorts. When reading the Bible, he would fondle you. Stroking the inside of a leg. His hand would be in his pocket, and so on.' (Participant)*

21. This participant went on to outline how, leaving the room, he was seen by another priest;

> *'I remember coming out of the room and passing another priest, and not even being asked why I was there.' (Participant)*

22. Several participants reported that they were directed or invited to quiet or isolated spaces on various pretexts, often based on their personal interests, and described how sexual abuse would then occur:

> The abuser took the participant up to the church gallery to see the organ and while there, anally raped the participant. The participant bled for a week afterwards and wore the clothes it happened in for a week afterwards because he was too scared to look at what was going on. *(Participant)*

This participant added that he did not swim for a week afterwards because:

> […] he was scared to *'fill the pool with blood.'* Recounting this incident, the participant added *'I thought I was going to die.' (Participant)*

23. Participants described the particular vulnerability of the period directly before or after class or practice when other children had not yet arrived or had left. One participant described how his participation in school performances meant that a particular staff member had access to the participant:

> *'I was frequently alone with him, because I had to practice. He frequently fondled my back, my bottom, and pulled me towards him. That happened over three years.' (Participant)*

Another participant reported:

> Fr. X told him to go around the back of the handball alley. The participant said seeing the look on the older boys' faces gave him the impression that they knew what might be going on. Fr. X had instructed him to *'loosen the belt on my shorts'.* When Fr. X saw that he hadn't done that, he became angry. *'I remember him chastising me, he said "you didn't do what you were told"'. (Participant)*

24. Some participants reported that they were taken to offices or residential rooms on pretexts such as for discussions, sex education, confession or medical examinations where, on some occasions, they would be shown sex education material or pornography (heterosexual and homosexual in content). One participant explained how sex education was done on a one-on-one basis with all the boys. He explained that parents were told about this at an open day.

> He went on to describe how, in his individual sex education sessions the abuser was masturbating under his cloak in both meetings. The examinations of his penis had been going on for a while. *(Participant)*

25. Others recounted similar experiences:

> *'He'd start talking about himself masturbating, he used to get a kick out of it.' (Participant)*
>
> *'He took me to his room to investigate the rash on my arm. The investigation involved having me strip naked. He proceeded to try to force back my foreskin. I became very upset. I am an only child. This information about masturbation was unknown to me. I said this was what you were telling me was so wrong two days ago.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I was asked to leave the classroom to go and see a priest. I sat down at the desk and the priest was holding a book in his hand which contained images of naked bodies' (Participant)*
>
> He brought [the participant] into the office and pinned him to his desk. The priest had an erection. He could feel it. He could smell drink off him. *"He was behind me on my back. He was really on top of me. It all happened in seconds." (Participant)*

26. Some participants reported that confession was used to manipulate and molest them and to elicit information, which felt intrusive and confusing to them as children.

> *'He wanted to review my academic progress, or lack thereof. Unfortunately, it turned into … it was more sinister. He wanted to conduct a confession into my sexual [activities] … I was exposed to information that I was totally clueless about. These 'confessions' went on for the next three years.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant said his first experience of abuse was when a priest in the confessional abused him. *(Participant)*

(iii) Sexual Abuse in Sleeping Quarters

27. Approximately a quarter of participants attended boarding schools and in their interviews with the Survivor Engagement team some reported being sexually abused as they lay in bed in their dormitory or cubicle. They described their isolation from their families, and their reliance on adults in the school as factors rendering them vulnerable to abuse.

> *'When you're in a boarding school, and away from home, you were kind of locked away in a bubble and you were seeking adult affirmation. And some of them really abused that position.' (Participant)*

28. Participants reported that in some cases, sexual abuse seemed to be integrated into the rituals of boarding school life. They described instances where they were made to undress and be naked in front of the staff for showers, which was understood to be compulsory:

> The pupils had showers twice a week. They had to strip naked and then run along the corridors to the communal showers. There were priests in the corridors watching them and sometimes there were priests in the showers 'helping' to wash them. *(Participant)*

29. They described priests and other members of the school staff touching them and masturbating them under their bed covers.

> *'He would want people to undress in front of him at nighttime. So, I learned to get undressed quickly before he came in. In the morning, he'd like to come and put his hands under the bed covers. If you heard him coming, you'd get out of the bed quickly.' (Participant)*

30. A participant described how a staff member used to enter their dorm at night and molest boys in their beds, moving from one bed to the next.

> *'I was rigid with fear. I was an extremely innocent 12-year-old.' (Participant)*

31. He went on to explain:

> *'None of us went to sleep the same way after that, we were all armed […] We were never sure whether or not he had gone.' (Participant)*

32. Another participant reported their experience of abuse in their dormitory:

> The abuser would sit on the chair and abuse the person in the bed. Everyone knew it was happening. *(Participant)*

33. Some reported that these behaviours were repeated by teachers or priests with access to their living quarters.

> One priest would often enter the students' cubicle, ripping off the bedclothes in the morning to check for erections and impure thoughts. *'It was hell on a daily basis.' (Participant)*

Another participant described a time when he was sick and in bed at his boarding school when a member of the religious order brought meals to his room:

> On the second day of being ill, the Brother came to the room and asked the participant to remove his pyjamas. The Brother laid on top of the participant and rubbed up and down. The Brother did not penetrate the participant, but continued until he was satisfied. *'I was covered in semen. I had to take a bath while he was gone. I was ill apart from anything else and this was happening. He knew that no one else was around.' (Participant)*

34. Other participants described how they saw others being raped in their sleeping quarters.

> On one of his first nights, he witnessed a boy being raped by two priests in the dorm while the others were sleeping. The boy was beaten unconscious, and they took turns with the boy. *(Participant)*

35. The participant reported that subsequently:

> The participant was taken from his bed at night, wrapped in a cloak of some sort, gagged and raped. *(Participant)*

36. Participants reported that there were few places where they felt safe. However, on occasion another teacher's class offered a degree of refuge.

> *'[That teacher] was upstairs. If you could get into [that teacher's] class, you could escape the corridors and the priests. You were safe. It was like Schindler's list.' (Participant)*

37. In addition to classrooms, dormitories and the residential areas, participants reported that sexual abuse happened in places both on and off school grounds. Locations included in the church on school grounds, in the library, on the stairs, in the corridors of the school, and outside the school's buildings such as behind a sports facility, or behind the kitchens. Some participants also reported that they were instructed to go to staff sleeping quarters and the pretexts that were used for this:

> At night, pupils were required to deliver milk to the priest's room, and all were terrified of being requested to deliver this milk alone, as it placed them in danger of abuse. *(Participant)*

(iv) Sexual Abuse at Swimming Pools

38. Many participants spoke of swimming pools and changing areas as sites of abuse. This included pools that were owned by schools and outside of schools.

> *'We came out of the pool and there were two of us left in the dressing room. Someone came into the room and put his hands on my chest and down below, and he kept doing it even though I was crying. I told Sr. [Name] and she told me to go back to my group.' (Participant)*
>
> One day in [name] swimming pool, the participant was taking a shower, and the abuser came in naked to the shower. He said that the abuse that took place at this time was the worst incident of abuse he experienced. This happened in 6th class. The participant felt that he went into a trance after this. *(Participant)*

39. Other participants also described how they were sexually abused in or around swimming pools.

> *'He would make you float in the pool on your back, and he would penetrate you with his middle finger. That happened many, many times. He would make us model underwear and take photos of us.' (Participant)*
>
> The abuse extended beyond the pool area and into the showers as well. *(Participant)*
>
> *'He'd encourage us to go into the pool naked. It wasn't traumatic for me at the time but it did seem like it shouldn't be happening.' (Participant)*
>
> The perpetrator instigated the abuse through grooming which took place at the swimming pool. [The participant] said that no one knew that the abuse was taking place. *(Participant)*

(v) Sexual Abuse Involving Use of Drugs, Physical Restraint or Violence

40. Some participants reported that they were in some way incapacitated to facilitate sexual abuse including the use of physical restraints; locking of doors; and the threat or use of physical violence. A small number reported that drugs or other substances were used to render them unconscious.

(a) Use of Substances or Drugs During Sexual Abuse

41. A small number of participants from a handful of schools reported that they were drugged into immobility or unconsciousness prior to sexual abuse or had heard that this had happened to others. Whilst some described how their memories of what occurred may have been affected, most reported that they were aware in the immediate aftermath of these episodes that something had happened, due to pain and physical trauma to their bodies, particularly their anus or genitals. A participant spoke of the use of drugs to facilitate sexual abuse:

> They used drugs to immobilise but still be conscious. *(Participant)*

42. Participants reported being drugged in the staff sleeping quarters, and there were some accounts of multiple persons being involved in the abuse and/or multiple victims.

> Upon entering the room, he reported a feeling of being overpowered, and having something put over his face. After this, he was completely unconscious and has no memory. He spoke of having no control over what happened to him. *(Participant)*

43. Some participants reported feeling the effects of the drugs they had been given after they regained consciousness.

> A very clear memory of abuse that the participant has is when the [person concerned] ejaculated on the participant and told him to lick the sperm off himself. Other memories are not so clear: *'I could never remember this, I can remember the beginning, I can never remember the middle, I can remember the end'*. This is because the participant suspects that the [person concerned] was using chloroform. What the participant remembers is seeing a little brown bottle that the [person concerned] would put on a pillow, however he suspects he lost consciousness. After waking up, the participant remembers feeling terribly ill with pounding headaches and nausea afterwards: *'I could never go home properly because I felt so ill. I used to take the long way home.' (Participant)*

44. Other participants described being aware of use of drugs to facilitate sexual abuse:

> The teacher's domination of the schoolchildren included sexual harassment in confessional encounters outside class, but during school hours. This included humiliating one-to-one costume fittings, full blown sexual assault, and drugging and raping multiple students. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant spoke about stories of chloroform being used to drug boys, and of gang rapes by three priests of one boy. *(Participant)*

45. One participant reported that he was given medication to make him ill as a pretext for sexual abuse. The participant described how he was given malaria tablets by a priest, and these tablets made him ill, so he would then have to go and seek help. He described how:

> It was during this time that the more violent rapes would take place. *(Participant)*

46. One participant reported being given alcohol by a prefect prior to being sexually abused:

> The participant did not recall being raped, but did note that alcohol was involved, which the prefect would bring. This was the participant's first introduction to alcohol and its effects. *(Participant)*

(b) Physical Restraint During Sexual Abuse

47. Some participants reported being physically restrained or confined by force during sexual abuse. Participants gave accounts of different forms of restraint, including being physically blocked into a space:

> The priest pushed himself up against him, grabbed him by the throat and the back of his neck. He physically pushed up against him. This caused great distress. *(Participant)*

48. A small number of participants reported being restrained with rope or handcuffs. One participant described being restrained during a violent assault:

> As a result of the rape, the participant was injured: '*I couldn't cycle home, I couldn't sit on the seat because I was so, so sore from what happened that night.' (Participant)*

49. Other participants reported being restrained and sexually assaulted by school staff while they were away from the school:

> While on the trip, the abuser took the participant away from the group, then proceeded to handcuff and molest him. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant stated that the abuse occurred off school grounds during (overnight trips) and included elements of bondage and fire. He was masturbated by the teacher at these times. *(Participant)*

(c) Locked rooms

50. Some participants reported being locked into rooms whilst being sexually abused:

> The participant said that this happened over a period of time, and occurred in a locked room that was selected by the abuser as being away from supervision and was sound proofed. *(Participant)*
>
> He took up music in school because his family were musical. In the music room, a priest came up and sexually assaulted, battered and falsely imprisoned him. *(Participant)*

51. Others reported being locked into dark rooms on their own as a means of punishment, or as a show of power over the child.

> The teacher inappropriately put his hands all over the participant and locked him in a dark room all on his own. *(Participant)*

(d) Physical Violence Related to Sexual Abuse

52. Some participants reported that physical violence appeared to be a source of sexual gratification, and others gave accounts of sexual abuse happening at the same time as a brutal physical assault.

> At night he was forced to go to the abuser's room. He would be forced to remove his clothes where he would be whipped. He was whipped with a long leather strap with lead weights known as a Pandy Bat. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant experienced physical pain immediately during and after the attack, and saw that as part of the attacker's intention, saying, he made sure he hurt me. *'I didn't know what he had done except that he had hurt me.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant remembers that his abuser held him against the toilet cistern, but the participant bit him. Unfortunately, that motivated the abuser to hit him. The participant cried, but the abuser hit him again and said he'd kill him. *(Participant)*
>
> After this violence the participant would be forced to sit on the abuser's knee where they would be tightly embraced and complimented, their head gently rubbed, while the abuser proceeded to ejaculate up the side of their short trousers. *'He was a sadist.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant spoke in detail of receiving regular and severe beatings from [Priest]. He used a leather strap with florins stitched into it, to give it more weight. The participant said that [Priest] used to move against him and smell him as he beat him. The participant believes it was a *'sexual thing for him.' (Participant)*

'He would take me out of my desk, stand me up against the corner of it. He would press himself up behind me and dry ride me up against the back of the desk. That was very unpleasant; it felt violent. The thing I found most revolting was the spittle that used to form on the bottom of his lip – that was disgusting to me.' (Participant)

C. How Children Understood and Responded

53. A common theme in the reports of participants was their accounts of how incomprehensible the nature and experience of sexual abuse was for them. Many participants referenced not understanding what was happening, and in many cases, this was explained as being due in some part to a sense that the abusive behaviour of adults was normalised in some schools because it was pervasive and sometimes unconcealed. Questioning adults and, in particular, members of religious orders on these issues was described as 'unthinkable'.

54. Many participants reported that this sense of normalisation made it very difficult to contemplate telling anyone about what was happening. They described how this was frequently coupled with a very direct message that questioning or talking about what was happening would result in punishment. Another strong theme was that as children, participants did not have the knowledge or language to make sense of what was happening to them. Many reported feeling traumatised at the time and sensing that sexual abuse was different to physical abuse. However, participants frequently reported having very little understanding of sex or sexual behaviour at the time, with many describing themselves as naïve or innocent when the abuse occurred. Some said they felt that what was happening was bad but internalised the shame of the experience. It was only later, when they began to more fully comprehend sexual behaviour, that they could understand the gravity of what had happened.

55. The literature on child sexual abuse[2] is clear that it is much more likely that children will not tell, rather than that they will tell about being sexually abused. This is made more difficult where children do not have the language or vocabulary to describe what has happened to them or where the culture surrounding them does not encourage children to come forward.

2 McElvaney, R, *Helping Children Tell About Sexual Abuse* (Jessica Kingsley, 2016)

(i) Normalisation of Sexual Abuse

56. Participants reported not questioning what was happening, primarily because of the faith they had in their church, or their trust in the religious order running the school.

> The participant stated that, as a child, he wasn't able to classify the abuse as something bad. *'That it was alright, it is a [name of religious order] Brother, if he is doing it, it is alright.' (Participant)*

57. Some described how the environment in their school and the normalisation of sexual abuse as being the only world they knew.

> *'When you're in it you don't realise that it's not normal. You don't realise that your norm is not the norm.' (Participant)*
>
> *'There was nothing normal about this. At the time I didn't know that.' (Participant)*
>
> The fondling went on for about a year until one day the teacher put a finger in the participant's rectum in front of the class. In response, the participant yelled *'ow!'* and *'gave him a really filthy look in front of the class.'* The participant suspects this is how the teacher knew he'd gone too far because he never touched the participant again. At the time, the participant didn't grasp the severity of the situation since this behaviour was normalised at the school. As a child, the participant thought he'd made a mistake and gave him benefit of the doubt. *(Participant)*

58. Other participants spoke of how the abuse was treated as a game and was introduced slowly and thereby made to seem like a normal part of school life. In these instances, participants reported that they were initially treated kindly and that a positive relationship was developed at first as a means of controlling them.

> *'It's scary. I had no idea what was going on. I thought to myself, is this normal, is this not normal? For the first 18 months they would say "Let us play with you, you play with us." Then they encouraged and asked for oral sex'. (Participant)*
>
> *'You would pretend to like it, but you were too young to know.' (Participant)*
>
> *A Brother in the order 'thought it was a great game to try to stick his hand down the front of our pants and pinch a scrotum or penis.' (Participant)*

(ii) Incomprehension and Fear

59. Participants described their lack of knowledge of sexual practices and how, as children, they were unaware that their experiences at the time constituted sexual abuse. Instead, they saw such behaviour as routine conduct from teachers, or members of the religious orders.

> The participant described how the abuse progressed from there, to the abuser taking off his clothes, fingering and masturbating. 'It's hard to understand when you are that age. You still do not know what the hell is going on, but I knew it was wrong.' *(Participant)*
>
> *'I had no knowledge that this was a sexual thing. No eight- or nine-year-old at that time knew anything about sex. I had an inclination that it shouldn't happen. We'd be trying to stay at the back of the line to avoid having to go up [for homework correction].' (Participant)*

60. Other participants characterised their lack of knowledge as naïve, despite being a child at the time.

> The participant describes themself as being extremely innocent as a child, and not realising what the teacher was even doing: *'We knew absolutely nothing.' (Participant)*

61. Another participant described not understanding when other pupils tried to warn them:

> *'They said "You need to be very careful here." I was confused. I thought they meant, be careful of the city, or of the traffic. They said, "No, you need to be careful of the priests and prefects. They like boys." I was pretty naïve.' (Participant)*

62. Some participants described how the absence of physical abuse, while they were being sexually abused, was confusing. Given their lack of understanding of sexual behaviour, they were unable to understand whether violence and sexual behaviour belonged together.

> The participant described the sexual abuse that happened to him as being different depending on the perpetrator. One abuser was more *'gentle'*, which caused much confusion because, as a teenager, it was hard to understand if the behaviour was normal or not. *(Participant)*

63. Other participants reported frequently feeling stunned or shock and struggling to make sense of what had happened.

> He only remembers getting on his bicycle to cycle home after the abuse trying to understand what had happened to him. *(Participant)*

64. Others reported trying to dissociate from what was happening or to block it out:

> *'Where I went to in my mind was warm sunny days, lying in wildflower meadows listening to buzzing bees and watching butterflies. Even with that, it was still painful and horrific. I couldn't escape.' (Participant)*

(iii) Children Felt Shame, Guilt and Responsibility

65. Many of the participants described corrosive feelings of guilt and shame at the time of the abuse, which they subsequently carried with them throughout their lives. Many reported that they felt, or were led to believe, that the sexual abuse they experienced was their fault.

> *'Shame, guilt, fear are huge shackles on a youngster, and I experienced those things very intensely.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant did not understand what had happened to him and had thought he was responsible for it. *'I've been with a counsellor, and I know this isn't the case but I had the feeling of being responsible or that I invited it. The word grooming to me was what you did with animals. I now know what it is. So, for 40-50 years I didn't know that, so I felt I had pimped myself out.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Shame; a concealed, contagious, and dangerous emotion. Shame informed me of an internal state of dishonour. It made me want to withdraw, to hide, which I did for a while. But now I'm here to give back the shame.' (Participant)*
>
> [The participant] states that he was *'filled with shame and fear […] I didn't have the words, just the feelings. But I have the words now.' (Participant)*

66. Participants reported struggling with feelings of shame, and fear that there was something inherently wrong with them as people, as well as an oppressive sense that they could not disclose what had happened to them.

> The participant experienced significant shame around the abuse, and this enforced a belief that it was not okay to talk about it. *(Participant)*

(iv) Religious Teaching and Self-Blame

67. Participants described how the religious teachings at the time, their own religious beliefs, and their deference to those in authority compounded their feelings of guilt or shame. They discussed how, within this context, shame was their only way of processing the abuse. As children, trying to make sense of what was happening, participants internalised the fault and shame of what was happening.

> The day following being raped, the participant was left in intense physical pain and unable to leave his bed to attend morning mass with his fellow students. He explained that he felt ashamed, and that he committed a terrible sin. *"I was in an awful state. I didn't know what to do. I felt terrible sick. I didn't go down to mass; we were supposed to go to mass every morning. The priest who was in charge of the whole lot […] came up and said go down to mass; I said I felt sick and couldn't. You see, I thought I was after making a terrible sin, so I couldn't go to communion." (Participant)*

68. Some participants described how feelings of shame were encouraged in children, with Confession being used as one tool to promote these ideas. In some cases, they reported that the persons concerned capitalised on this dynamic.

> The participant viewed the Confession ritual as key to this, as these were often the first encounters whereby the abuser could manipulate the children. The participant feels that the sexual harassment in Confession normalised the abuse, shaming, and dehumanisation of the children. *(Participant)*

(v) Being Singled Out

69. Many of the participants described wondering why they were singled out. Some participants spoke about their particular vulnerabilities, such as having absent or deceased parents, or challenging home lives compared to other classmates, and how these circumstances could be used as a means to prevent the child from resisting or speaking about what was happening. In some cases, participants felt that students who were perceived to be 'good' were singled out, whereas others felt that students who were perceived to be 'bad' were targeted. Others described social class as a factor in whether pupils were subjected to sexual abuse, and a sense that careful note was taken of pupils' home circumstances. Participants described the additional vulnerability of students who attended boarding schools, as being essentially cut off from outside supports.

> The participant said that the abusers knew who they were targeting, choosing children who might not be able to report the abuse. *(Participant)*

'The Brother in [that school] would never have abused me if he knew I had a family I could talk to. He never went to those from better families. I couldn't do anything.' (Participant)

'These guys (the abusers) knew those things. They spot the kids who are loners […] they know the kids who don't get their parents at the side of the pitch […] and I probably was one of those.' (Participant)

70. Participants reported that not coming from a 'traditional' family made them vulnerable:

> When the participant was in school, he ran away numerous times. He said that everyone saw him as a problematic child. He was not in his parents' care. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant also said that he and a sibling were adopted and that abusers often pick on vulnerable people. *(Participant)*

71. Some participants described well-behaved or academically successful students being targeted:

> To avoid any contact with this teacher, or any other figure of authority, the participant reported that he stopped doing his homework and was generally no longer a good student. *'If you were a good boy, you got abused.' (Participant)*

72. Participants described the impact of social class and how this varied in different cases:

> *'If you were a middle-class boy, you were chosen, and if you had health issues, but not if your father was somewhere upper class.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant says the lay teachers *'selected poor people like me, who were then the subjects of abuse.' (Participant)*
>
> In secondary school, the participant felt that the abuser was looking after the sons of the other families while targeting the participant because they came from a lower-class background. *(Participant)*

73. Another participant felt that his sexual orientation was a factor in his being singled out:

> *'I had a strong feeling; the teacher and serial abuser was able to pick out people's vulnerabilities. There was an unsaid suggestion he could reveal your vulnerability if you didn't do what he said. I think he identified early on that I was gay, and used this to make sure I would stay quiet.' (Participant)*

74. Others described blaming their intrinsic selves or personality for their vulnerability. Many felt that this perceived weakness meant that what happened to them was their fault.

> The participant thinks that he probably would have let it happen to him again, because he was so scared. He thought no one would like him because there was something wrong with him. He had two brothers in the same school and the abuser never touched either of his other brothers, which made him feel not normal. *(Participant)*

D. Grooming and Gaining Access to Children

75. In the context of sexual abuse, grooming is defined as a series of manipulative behaviours and actions to establish trust or create an environment where children would feel less comfortable resisting sexual abuse. This can involve showing particular interest in a child or singling them out for positive attention at first to form attachments. A number of participants in the Survivor Engagement process reported that grooming and efforts to gain access to children occurred as a precursor to sexual abuse, and these actions included leading extracurricular activities, involvement in activities where children were present, and developing relationships with children's families.

76. One participant described how he was initially befriended and treated in a way that suggested that he was special before he was sexually abused:

> The abuser put his hand in his shorts and then penetrated the participant's anus with his fingers. The abuse was interrupted by other students walking in and it stopped. He is unsure if the other students saw what happened. *"I remember his smell and his face."* The participant was terrified and froze. The abuser had taken interest in him for the months leading up to the abuse, paying him special attention. He did not tell anyone what happened. *(Participant)*

77. Participants described the various strategies used to create opportunities for sexual abuse of children. Whereas violence and intimidation were described earlier in this chapter as part of how sexual abuse took place, in other circumstances, grooming and other ways of forming attachments to children and young people were used.

> *'No, it was one of those environments, you dare not talk, even to your peers. You don't know who was involved. They focused on individuals, yet you knew they were attending to other boys in the room. There was a certain amount of jealousy there. Why is this person getting more attention than me?' (Participant)*

(i) Extra-Curricular Activities

78. In many instances participants reported that activities occurring outside of the regular school timetable when fewer adults were around was when sexual abuse took place. Participants reported that activities such as sports, running clubs, managing libraries, theatre productions, school scout groups, music lessons, nature walks, trips abroad and swimming excursions were among the circumstances in which they were sexually abused. These activities often involved a child being alone with a teacher or other adult.

> The participant recalls that the abusers looked for ways to access children in the school, and that sports was one such way. He noted that he played different sports and that *'These were places where I was abused. The dressing room, at the football pitch, the handball alley that was in Croke Park at the time. I still tremble every time I go to see the Dubs play.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant said that he stopped participating in sports (to avoid being abused). He recalled that the teacher used to train the rugby team and that seemed to be a cause of his rage on occasions. He said: *'I remember how he smelled, the spit on his mouth, shaking with rage.' (Participant)*

79. Some participants reported that their experience of sexual abuse occurred during organised opportunities off school grounds or during school holidays, often involving nights away. Participants said that these excursions were rarely questioned by other adults.

> The participant spoke of how the abuser targeted him both inside and outside of the school, even during the school holidays, and how nobody questioned why the abuser would come and get him from the swimming pool. (Participant)
>
> The participant explained how the abuser used to take students out on nature walks, where the abuser would create excuses to separate and molest the participant. *(Participant)*
>
> During the summer, to keep contact with him, the abuser introduced him to golf. There was a letter sent home to his parents to request permission for the participant to take the train to Howth to play golf. While there, the abuser would abuse him in the B&B room. *(Participant)*

80. Participants described how these activities, which were different from everyday school life, provided access to multiple children:

> While on the trip, the abuser took the participant away from the group, then proceeded to handcuff and molest him. The abuser made a second attempt the following night, but the participant told him to "fuck off" and the abuser took someone else instead. *(Participant)*

(ii) Grooming by Exploiting Children's Interests

81. Some participants reported how their personal interests were used as a method of gaining access to them. Personal interests mentioned included animals, photography, swimming, sports or music.

One participant described being given responsibility for taking care of a class pet. This required him to stay back after class alone with the teacher. He described what happened during these times:

> Brother [Name] attempted to fondle him, to watch him urinating and tried to forcibly kiss him on numerous occasions. *'I would feel I was being groomed.' (Participant)*

Others described their experiences:

> The abuser was nine or ten years older than the participant and used his interest in photography to start a friendship with him. At night and after curfew, the abuser would enter the participant's room to share photographs, even though it was against the rules and inappropriate. *(Participant)*
>
> The abuser was a music teacher at [name of school] who normalised inappropriate touching by teaching the participant how to breathe during private music lessons. *(Participant)*

82. One participant recalled how a Brother told him that he was a good singer, and that he wanted him to sing at a wedding. The participant was told to come to the school at midday, and that he would be driven to the church where they would be singing.

> *'I didn't know if I was going or what was going on. He brought me to a church and no one else was there. He got me to stand up in front of the altar. He had a suit on with his white collar. He stood halfway up the aisle and told me to sing. I thought it was something else altogether. He clapped when I finished and told me to come towards him. He was crying and he put his arms around me. He said "you are ready now". I know now that he had a plan for me obviously.' (Participant)*

83. This participant went on to describe how the Brother drove them to a wooded area where the Brother exposed himself and forced the participant's head over his penis.

> *'I hadn't a fucking clue what was going on. I was scared, he was holding my hair firmly. He told me to kiss and suck it while praising me. I hadn't a clue about penises or ejaculation. I kept doing what he told me, he was aggressive. The next thing he ejaculated in my mouth – I nearly got sick. I looked up at his eyes and you would swear he was in heaven. You wouldn't see someone's eyes like that after taking heroin.' (Participant)*

84. Some participants described the adults concerned behaving as though they were in a relationship with the participants.

> The abuser adopted a friendly persona when supervising students outdoors at lunchtimes, sitting on a wall, chatting. The participant only gradually came to understand the full meaning and implications of what the abuser had done over the following one and a half years. He began to feel a *'real loathing'* towards the abuser and stopped speaking with him. The priest asked them *'Why don't you want to talk to me anymore?'*. The participant described the tone of that interaction as being like a spurned lover or boyfriend, even though he was aged 15 and the priest approximately 50 years old. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant felt he was majorly betrayed by the abuser: *'because I thought this guy liked me […] I thought I was special to him.' (Participant)*
>
> As the abuser became friendlier with him, the abuser invited him to his flat, which was around the corner from the school. The participant was abused and raped on multiple occasions and molested on multiple occasions by the abuser at both his flat, at the school and off-site. *(Participant)*

85. A few participants described what they viewed as "very brazen" grooming behaviour; creating situations where the adult could spend an unusual amount of time with the young person, including spending nights together.

> His abuser was very open with the amount of time they spent together. The relationship began out of friendship. The participant didn't understand what was happening and didn't really understand that there was anything wrong. They would go out in the car together and go to hotels; the participant had visited their abuser's house. His parents would answer the phone, it would be their abuser and the phone would be given to them. His peers were always questioning what was going on. He distanced himself from his friends and spent more and more time together. *(Participant)*

86. Some participants reported how there was a tacit understanding that they would be sexually abused if they accepted something from the person concerned, for example, borrowing money or cigarettes from them.

> *'He said even though we are having this chat, as regards the cigarettes, it was best if I did not tell any of the rest of the boys, because I could get into big trouble. He still took the money for the first lot of cigarettes, and he gave me some more cigarettes and sweets. It was like we had opened "the account".' (Participant)*
>
> It was generally viewed by the boys that a sexual relationship with a priest was *'part of the deal [of borrowing money].' (Participant)*

(iii) Building Trusting Relationships with Children's families to Gain Access

87. Some participants reported that the person who sexually abused them had visited the family home, had tea with their parents and built a relationship with the family. They described this as being a common practice at the time, and that priests visiting the family home would be unlikely to raise suspicion, and indeed, they may have been welcomed by the families. Participants reported situations where the person who sexually abused them befriended and socialised with parents and in some cases slept over in the family home.

> The participant said the grooming behaviour continued outside of the school also. The perpetrator would drive around meeting the parents of children and call to their houses. *(Participant)*

88. Participants described their parents being flattered by the attention of members of the clergy. Participants described how priests ingratiated themselves with the family:

> The participant's family thought it was great that the priest was taking him under their wing, looking after their child. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant said that the Father groomed him before he ever touched him. The Father would drop him home, come into his house and speak with his family about how good a boy he was. His family thought that this Father was wonderful and great to be helping their son. *(Participant)*
>
> *'He drove me home after school and my now-deceased mother brought him to the front room and gave him tea. Afterwards, we went to see this place. On our way, as we walked through the fields, he dragged me into the bushes and sexually abused me. When we got to the waterfall, he sexually abused me again. The abuser let my trousers fall down and abused me with his penis.' (Participant)*

89. Participants discussed how their parents had a high degree of trust and respect for those in religious life which was used to facilitate their access to children in the home. In many cases, they described their parents and family members viewing those in religious life as occupying a moral high ground, reflecting a wider societal understanding and reverence. This view may have restricted the possibility of parents thinking that these individuals could exploit that trust.

> [The person concerned] would go for dinner in the children's parents' house and get close to them, asking if he could go upstairs when the child was in bed to give them a blessing. Children were abused in their own homes in this way. *(Participant)*

The [member of a religious order] sent the boy money, and over time, befriended his parents. He lived in Dublin but visited the boy's family home regularly, would go to the pub with his parents and later that evening/night would go to the boy's room and sexually abuse him. He would praise him to his parents as being very bright and his parents were flattered and delighted to have a [member of a religious order] as a friend. *(Participant)*

'How [the abuse] started and how it continued I can't really explain it, but it just did. It was extraordinary because it was never in the boarding school. It was in my parents' house.' (Participant)

90. This participant added

'And when he visited my parents' house, he stayed in my room. There were two beds and he stayed there with me.' (Participant)

91. Some participants described that, as children, they had mixed emotions while being abused, which sometimes included positive feelings around being shown attention by an adult, or being touched in a gentle way or where there was an absence of physical violence. This was reported as a source of guilt and shame.

'At 8 or 9 years of age I didn't understand what an erection was, but this man made me feel his erection and pressed it against me. I remember the warm feeling. It intrigued me and scared me and confused me because it was not penetrative or painful and there were, at times, feelings of warmth or some sensation that I would enjoy. That made me feel very guilty at the time, and it still does now.' (Participant)

E. Children Disclosing Abuse

92. Participants were asked if they felt able to tell anyone about the sexual abuse they were experiencing at the time. The majority said they were not able to tell anyone, either due to shame, thinking no one would believe them or not knowing how to tell. Of those that did tell their parents, and were believed, few saw any substantial consequences for those responsible for sexually abusing them. Very few participants were aware of any criminal prosecutions at, or around, the time of the abuse. Some children who disclosed what was happening at the time were either not believed or were told not to tell anyone about the abuse.

(i) Non-Disclosure – Why Many Children Did Not Tell

93. Some participants described wanting to protect parents who had serious health issues, or who were dealing with bereavement and loss. Some described feeling that the financial commitment their parents were making by sending them to a particular school in order to maximise their career prospects meant that they couldn't speak about what was happening.

> The participant deliberately didn't tell their parents, because *'I didn't want them to feel that they were neglectful in any way, because they weren't, they were two great parents.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant's feeling of guilt was intensified by his perception of having let his parents down as they were of humble backgrounds and were making sacrifices to give their son a private education. *'I saw him [the participant's father] in the evening counting the money. The more I disconnected from the school the guiltier I felt that I couldn't justify their investment in my education.' (Participant)*

94. A number of participants described how the idea that religious figures could abuse children in this way was unimaginable and this made it very difficult, leaving them feeling that there was nobody that they could tell.

> *'Absolutely not [didn't tell anyone]. Priests were like God's right-hand man on Earth.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Who could you tell? The Church ran the country back then.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant never told anyone at the time but remarked, *'it's not what kids say, it's what kids don't say.'* Students at the school were 'brainwashed' into staying silent. The school cultivated a culture of fear. The students never had a voice and there was no one to tell. *'They knew how to show you that they had the utter power'. (Participant)*

95. Some participants described how having a religious family, and a culture of deference to representatives of the Church made it difficult or impossible to tell family members what was happening. One participant explained why he didn't tell his parents. His father was an alcoholic who died when the participant was still in his teens and his mother trusted figures of authority,

> *'She believed the Church, the doctors and the guards were the hierarchy. I waited until she died until I made a statement about him.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I had extremely conservative Catholic parents. Looking back, I can understand that perhaps I had a fear that I wouldn't be believed.' (Participant)*

96. Some participants reported that they had acknowledged what was happening to their peers at the time, but they felt that telling other adults about what was happening may not have any effect or could result in further negative consequences for them.

> *'You couldn't tell; that time religion was a very big thing. They had such power, they put a fear into you that you'd get another beating if you told on them.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant recalled how they could not tell anyone given the pervading influence of the priests at the time. *'Once he got a grip of you, you were done for. I never said it to anyone. In that era, the word was the priests', and that was it.' (Participant)*

97. Other participants said that they didn't tell anyone because they felt ashamed or as though what was happening was somehow their fault.

> *'My father had his own problems with alcohol. He was a lovely man, and at times I did think about telling him. But then I felt a terrible sense of shame and I didn't.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I did not tell anyone else because I thought this was my fault. It felt like if you did tell someone they are going to tell another person, and before you know where you are you would be in an office somewhere and your parents would be sent for.' (Participant)*

(ii) Intimidation and silencing of children

98. Some participants reported that they didn't tell anyone because they had been threatened or warned not to tell and felt scared of the possible consequences if they did. They described threats such as going to hell, physical punishment, not being able to pursue a dream or profession, not being able to see their family, something bad happening to the family or being killed.

> The participant spoke of his fear of consequences should he have disclosed the abuse. *'He was threatening that if you tell anyone you'll never see your parents again. The Brothers had that grip over you; you had that fear already.' (Participant)*
>
> *'The priest told me if I told anyone my mother wouldn't go to heaven.' (Participant)*
>
> On two other occasions, [Priest] raped the participant in [location] and would always say: *'This is our secret; you can't tell anyone.' (Participant)*

99. Participants described concealing what was happening:

> *'They train you to be quiet […] people need to understand that it takes every ounce of horror in your being to go against your training and say it. The worst thing I could do in the whole world was say it.' (Participant)*

Another participant described how he hid sheets under his bed:

> These sheets had blood and semen stains from being raped while he was unconscious. *(Participant)*

100. Some participants reported being issued with death threats to not disclose what had happened before they left the school. A participant described how children were:

> […] individually threatened that if they told anyone when they left, they would be killed. *(Participant)*

(iii) Disclosure – When Children Told and Were Believed

101. As children, some participants did tell their parents about the abuse when it happened. In some cases, they were believed at the time and parents took action by bringing a complaint to the school, or, in some cases informing the Gardaí. In these cases, the participants said that they were not aware of any criminal justice consequences/proceedings at the time.

> *'The guy was forced out of the school, was anything else done? – no, but that's typical 40 years later, never mind then.' (Participant)*

102. Some described how parents intervened to remove them from the school.

> After the abuse was reported, the participant was moved within a day or two to the very local [school name] primary school. *(Participant)*

103. One participant explained how he ran away from school and called his father to pick him up:

> When his father picked him up, the participant told his parents what had been happening and that he was not going back. His father drove to [school] to collect the participant's brothers, and none returned to the school. *(Participant)*

104. Another participant recalled feeling he had to tell after hearing about another student suffering similar abuse:

> At the time, the participant did not tell anyone about this abuse. A year later, the participant learned that a school friend had attended the school trip a year later and experienced the same type of abuse. After learning that this abuse had happened to another student, the participant was prompted to tell his father and who absolutely believed the participant. *(Participant)*

105. Participants who told their parents were often not believed initially, but in some cases, they persisted until they were believed.

> Later, when his parents finally believed him, the participant reported that his mother wrote a letter to the school, but *'nothing happened, they brushed it under the carpet.' (Participant)*

106. In some cases, following an action by the parent, the sexual abuse stopped for the participant but little else changed.

> He only remembers getting on his bicycle to cycle home after the abuse, trying to understand what had happened to him. He told his mother who contacted the school. He has no memory of anything happening as a result of his mother reporting the incident. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant highlighted how his parents were supportive of him when he told them about it. He left school one day after it happened and told his mother. *'I was believed by my parents. I was taken seriously. I am very lucky. A lot of former classmates didn't tell their parents, or they wouldn't have been believed.' (Participant)*

107. This participant further recounted that:

> While the sexual abuse stopped for him immediately after that, the teacher continued to teach in the school and the physical abuse continued. *(Participant)*

108. Participants reported cases where even when parents reported the abuse to the school authorities, the school was viewed as being reluctant or slow to act.

> The headmaster asked the participant's father what he would like to happen now, and the participant's father explained they wanted the abuser to be kept away from children. In reply, the headmaster explained this would take some time, but the school would move him out of school performances. The participant explained it took another year before the abuser was moved out of the school. *(Participant)*

109. Participants felt that in some cases action may have been taken to protect the reputation of the school, rather than to protect children from abuse.

> [The participant] is not sure what her mother told the abuser, but she believes that the mother told him to stop what he was doing to her daughter. She feels they reacted quickly, because they were a fee-paying school and therefore the children that attended had somewhat influential parents. *(Participant)*

110. Participants reported feeling that the consequences for the child outweighed the consequences for the person who was sexually abusing them. In some cases, this involved examination by physical or mental health professionals for the participant.

> After their family reported the incident to the head of the school, the participant had to undergo assessments with a psychiatrist and had to change his class, which caused him distress. *(Participant)*

111. Not all parents found out about the abuse directly from the participant. In some cases, they deduced what was happening, or were told by someone else.

> When his mother learned about the practice of the boys swimming naked, she complained to the head of the primary school and the 'free swim' was then closed. *(Participant)*

> There was a time when their mother spoke to the principal of the school, and the outcome was that they were not to be in locked classrooms, they were not to be alone together, and they were not to go out together. *(Participant)*

112. Some parents did not have the resources to follow through with actions after they were told:

> His mother didn't believe him, but they got him checked by a doctor when his parents saw his arm bruised. His parents tried to get a solicitor but didn't have enough money. The doctor told his mother his back passage was hurt, and he had been tampered with. *(Participant)*

113. Some participants were believed by their parents but for various reasons the parents did not pursue further action.

> The participant told her mother about what had happened at school when they went home that day. The participant's mother believed their story, but warned them sternly, *'Don't tell your father, or he'll kill him'*. The participant was confused. She did not understand why her mother did not want her to tell her father, but she complied with her instruction, nonetheless. *(Participant)*

> The participant said they told their parents about it, and they were believed and supported, but when asked about telling anybody else what happened, they said they had not. *'You didn't report these things back then.' (Participant)*

114. For some participants, parents did not believe them or thought that there was exaggeration, although many subsequently believed their children at a later point.

> *'My mum thought he [participant's friend] was telling tall stories when he said why we didn't want to go to the pool. We told mum we didn't want to go to the pool because of the priest. It was not in her experience that a priest would abuse a minor. She dismissed it and said it was a generous offer which we would respect by joining him at the pool. So, the abuse went on longer than it should have.' (Participant)*

This participant went on to explain how he told her again when he was older:

> *I told her again later, when I was 18, with my dad. She believed me then and was remorseful for the rest of her life that she had let me down as a parent.' (Participant)*

115. Other participants had similar experiences:

> He eventually told his mother and father, and they didn't believe him. The school paid for him to be examined by a doctor. When the doctor would ask him questions about what he was feeling, he didn't want to answer in front of his mother. His doctor said his issues were down to his transition between childhood and adulthood. *(Participant)*

Another participant explained:

> When the participant informed his mother about the inappropriate behaviour, his mother did not take these incidents seriously, and explained that he was only messing around. He had a closer relationship with his mother, compared to his father. His father continued to have a close relationship with the abuser until his death. *(Participant)*

116. None of the participants was aware of any criminal justice processes for sexual abuse at the time, though some were charged and/or convicted later when participants or other survivors reported sexual abuse as adults. Participants described disclosures of abuse as effectively ignored or denied by schools or individual adults in those schools. One participant described telling a teacher about how another member of school staff was molesting him, and the teacher:

> … beat him, as he rejected what he had said about his abuser. *(Participant)*

Another participant explained:

> All disclosures went nowhere, and abuse was allowed to go on. The priest who he made the disclosure to avoided him after this. *(Participant)*

117. This participant further noted that he knew that:

> … other boys' parents made complaints before, during and after the participant's abuse about their respective children. The [member of religious order] would say it was the first they had heard about it every time and would do nothing about it. *(Participant)*

Other participants described their experiences:

> The participant was sent home, and he told his mother and father [about the abuse]. His father spoke to the head of school; however it was broadly denied, and the blame was put on him, rather than any responsibility taken by the school. He felt blamed by others after the experience of the abuse. *(Participant)*

> The participant was asked to try out for one of the school's rugby teams. On reporting to the priest in charge, he was molested/abused aggressively by him, while trying on the kit in a separate dressing room. He rebuffed the abuser and reported the matter to a priest in the college, who said not to worry, and that he would make sure it did not happen again. He was instructed to continue to go to rugby practice and when the same priest abused him again, he refused to return. *(Participant)*

F. Perceptions of a Culture of Cover-Up and Collusion

118. A majority of participants gave accounts of what they saw as various forms of cover-up by those in authority. Cover-up is generally understood to be the masking or concealing of an illegal act or situation from being made public. Collusion is understood as a secret cooperation for an illegal or dishonest purpose. It is more often used in the context of high level organised planned agreement or collusion between institutions. A small number of participants referred to incidents which they believed indicated that collusion had happened.

(i) Cover-up

119. Participants reported a range of circumstances which led them to believe that sexual abuse was covered up. These included situations where participants described how adults in schools appeared to know about, or suspect, sexual abuse and taking no action. Many participants reported that people responsible for sexually abusing children were moved to other schools or countries, or retired.

120. Many recalled the cultural factors at play at the time both within the school walls and outside. The majority of participants highlighted the influence of the Catholic church and clergy or religious orders at the time, which they described as contributing to the difficulties in reporting abuse, being believed or seeing any action taken, particularly against members of a religious order. This, for many participants, contributed to a sense of powerlessness.

121. Many participants expressed the view that other members of staff in their schools must have been aware of sexual abuse taking place, describing situations and incidents that they felt should clearly have indicated that something was wrong.

> The participant did not tell anybody about what had happened to them, until a new priest in the school approached them to ask about their experience with the perpetrator, as the priest had heard about the perpetrator's actions before. They told this priest. But nothing changed for them after this talk. *(Participant)*

> The participant remembers [a staff member] was standing inside the door to the left with his cap on, and that he was sniggering as the Brother led the participant inside. *(Participant)*

> On one occasion, another teacher walked into the classroom while the abuse was taking place. This other teacher made no attempt to stop the abuse. *'This teacher walked into the classroom and walked back out.' (Participant)*

> A different teacher would come out to his house to help him learn how to read and write. He was trying to help. He used to be put at the back of the class. The teacher knew what was going on. That's why he would go out to the house to help him read and write. This teacher also hit the man who abused the participant. *(Participant)*

122. Participants described in some cases, young people presenting in obvious distress but this did not appear to give rise to any questions from staff in the school.

> Every Tuesday, the day of the private lessons, the participant would complain about diarrhoea to the infirmary. The staff never raised any questions about this. *(Participant)*

123. Participants reported that some staff acknowledged, albeit obliquely, that what was happening was not appropriate.

> Other teachers in the school stopped speaking to the teacher in question, and another teacher pulled them both aside and said: 'Be careful'. There were many concerns in the school, the participant said that it became more about the reputation of the school than the pupil. *(Participant)*

124. Some participants described incidents where the behaviour of other members of staff made them think that they knew what was happening and were making some attempt to prevent it (although not actually addressing it):

> *'One evening, I was on the top floor of the primary school, waiting for a priest. A man or a woman came along and asked me what I was waiting for. When I told them, they said "Off you go". They must have known what was going on.' (Participant)*

125. Some participants described what they saw as a system of sexual abuse that was facilitated by other priests in the school.

> *'The abuser had an office with a traffic light system on the outside, when it was locked, everyone suspected he was abusing someone.' (Participant)*
>
> One participant said that the other priests knew about [Priest] raping boys under the stage while they were preparing for school plays. The participant noted: *"I escaped that time, but the next boy didn't." (Participant)*

126. Participants described a culture of silence where sexual abuse was an "open secret" in some schools:

> *'The horrible thing on reflection was that it didn't stop for all my classmates even though he had been highlighted to the school. The school knew.' (Participant)*
>
> *'This wasn't cloak and dagger stuff, it was done out in the open for everyone to see.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I did not tell anyone what went on. I had twenty-four classmates in the class who all saw what was going on. It was part of what happened in class.' (Participant)*
>
> *'He had a reputation that he liked touching boys, that he liked them sitting on his lap. It was really an open secret. That's the bizarre part. It was not even clandestine. To say the facts were hidden from the authorities that ran the school at the time beggars belief. It is not possible.' (Participant)*
>
> [I]t was so intense and very hard for anyone to understand the power wielded by the priests, and, furthermore, the fact that every one of them knew. The terror was sexual, psychological, social, emotional and mental. *(Participant)*

127. Participants reported that they could not understand how other staff appeared to be able to overlook what was happening, as it appeared to them as children that it would have been impossible not to suspect something. Participants reported that others may have been aware or turned a blind eye to the abuse. One participant described what happened when a fellow pupil reported abuse to a priest in the school, describing how the priest

> … went ballistic and slapped him around the place, [saying] '*How dare you, that doesn't happen'*. *(Participant)*

Other participants reported similar inaction:

> Looking back, the participant believes that other teachers knew what was going on but chose to not interfere. *(Participant)*
>
> *'What I found the most irritating, was that the headmaster of the college didn't do anything about this.' (Participant)*
>
> The headmaster was a priest and pretended he wasn't involved, but the participant recalls that the headmaster was caught listening at the door of a bathroom. He believed that the headmaster knew what was going on. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant said that it only stopped when the nun in charge came in, but no one said anything. *(Participant)*
>
> *'It is impossible for me not to believe that most people working in that college were not aware that this was happening at some level. They could not have been that naïve. They could not have kept their heads in the sand. Were they complacent? Were they afraid? Were they participating in sexual abuse with no consequences? If it is the latter, then these sons of bitches need to go to jail for a long time.' (Participant)*
>
> The day the participant was abused, he also encountered his friend waiting outside the office crying, knowing what was going to happen. *'It was a well-known fact in the school that he [the principal] was an abuser. It was normal. Everyone knew this principal was abusing people. Every teacher knew what was going to happen. They were complicit as well. It was an open secret. A rite of passage. Everyone knew. At the time everything was being swept under the carpet. To this day it is still being swept under the carpet.' (Participant)*

128. Some participants reported that their school had multiple staff members involved in either carrying out or facilitating sexual abuse, and some participants expressed the view that a paedophile ring was operating. In some cases, participants described suspecting that individuals were facilitating other staff members' abuse of children.

'It was very clear there was a conspiracy going on. There were 12 priests present and nine were paedophiles. Three were involved with me together on one occasion and [also] apart.' (Participant)

The participant referred to the school being run as a paedophile ring. *'You wouldn't want to hear what else they did to me; you would wonder about the world. It was an orchestrated machine that ran for years and is still running.' (Participant)*

The participant experienced one protracted period of abuse that involved 4 separate abusers. He has recently discovered that school friends have vivid memories of him being abused in school. The participant described a system of collusion and co-operation that was orchestrated by his four abusers. *(Participant)*

(ii) Leadership Inaction

129. A small number of participants reported their belief that senior leadership within some religious orders who were running schools were aware of sexual abuse in their school and failed to respond appropriately. As described by participants, this included ignoring sexual abuse, facilitating abuse or participating in the abuse. Participants reported that parents or children were discouraged, dissuaded, or threatened not to take their complaints further by those in authority in the school or order:

'We were treated like sweets, handed around, that doesn't happen in an environment where they can say they knew nothing … it's not about not being Christians, it's not that they let the side down and didn't protect children, but that they facilitated the abuse and colluded … it's not just [name of religious order], other orders too. This was concerted, they were aware of it.' (Participant)

'I went to the principal and I told him what had happened. He asked if I was confused about the perpetrator being sympathetic to me' (Participant)

(iii) Perceptions of Collusion Relating to Sexual Abuse

130. Some participants reported that people outside the school would have been aware of sexual abuse and failed to act. This included healthcare professionals.

The Brother demanded that the participant get out of bed and strip. After being beaten, the participant had a number of marks across his body and when he went to a doctor to explain what happened, he recalled that a report was made but never followed up with by any authorities. *(Participant)*

131. Some participants expressed the view that there was a strong relationship between the religious orders and the Gardaí, and that some members of the force had attended the schools in question. Some said that they were aware of people being taken by the Gardaí for questioning. In these cases, participants reported that they did not think that any arrests were made Participants reported that this made it very difficult to address what was happening.

> There were women working there at the time who were suspicious of what was happening and may have called the guards. The participant asked where the priest was, and they were told by other boys that the guards took him. The priest was back the next day. *(Participant)*

> He told a priest in 1978 in the school, and a detective involved with the hurling team, but nothing was done to stop the abuse. *(Participant)*

> The participant recalled that people from his area knew that the teacher was a serial abuser. The abuser boarded in the same house as the local Gardaí. *'It is not clear if the local police were aware at the time, but I find it incredulous that some members of the Gardaí were unaware at the time, as very little happens in a small provincial town that they don't know.' (Participant)*

132. Some participants reported that they were aware of instances where a person had been caught in the act of sexual abuse by people in authority and how there were no consequences because of the influence of the Order.

> He physically and sexually abused students. The participant is aware that he was caught in a hotel room by Gardaí with a ten-year-old child and was released because of where he worked. *(Participant)*

133. Other participants said they reported the abuse to the Gardaí at a later date but they had to persist before anything was done.

> *'Why did the Garda or DPP ignore the first information on this abuser? Why did they not prosecute?' (Participant)*

(iv) Transfers of Staff Between Schools and Countries

134. Several of the participants reported that people were moved between schools run by the religious orders and that in many cases, this was to avoid dealing with sexual abuse. Participants reported that this was likely to have facilitated further sexual abuse, and some spoke of how, as adults, they have looked into this and discovered that people who sexually abused them as children were either moved to their school from somewhere else or were moved on to another school at a later stage.

'They just wanted to hide it away, moving priests from college to college.' (Participant)

He said that Fr. X was moved again and again from place to place. The participant said that he made a complaint about Fr. X *'but nothing was done.' (Participant)*

He reports how the abuser was moved around; his abuse hidden by the [name of religious order]. When he was reported for abuse by another pupil, he remained in his teaching post for the rest of the year and then sent on a sabbatical. After that he began working in [name of] hospital. *(Participant)*

'It's like a house of cards: they kept shuffling the decks, so you never know who was there.' (Participant)

135. Some participants reported that staff transfers sometimes occurred abruptly and without warning or explanation:

At Christmas that year the class was told Br. [Name] was sick and would not return to his post. After which it emerged, he was moved to (another town). *(Participant)*

The students were not happy that the abuser just disappeared, and they were never informed. *(Participant)*

This participant explained that students continued to feel vulnerable as there was external access to their dormitory and they did not know where the abuser had gone.

136. Some participants reported that transfers of members of religious orders extended beyond Ireland and was therefore likely to affect children in other countries too. In some cases, participants described becoming aware after their own experience of sexual abuse that those responsible for what had happened had been moved from school to school. Participants reported their views that it was likely that other children were sexually abused in Ireland and overseas as a result.

'The fact that reports of abuse in my time were continually ignored, and the perpetrators moved away to other schools in Ireland and abroad sickens me to the core and is something the Order should never be allowed to forget, nor hide.' (Participant)

By the time [the priest] got to [name of school] it was the third time he had been abusing children, as the headmaster in [name of school] had shepherded him through three different schools. He was a serial paedophile and was still teaching and given classes to teach, despite the knowledge. *(Participant)*

137. In one instance the participant said they believed that a report was sent to the Department of Education, but they did not think anything was done in response:

> Measann an agallaí go raibh a fhios ag an Ord é, agus sin é an fá go raibh sé ag dul ó áit go háit. Measann an agallaí comh maith go raibh tuairisc thabharte isteach ag an Roinn faoi, agus gur lig an Roinn leis an fear seo leanúint ar adhaigh ag obair, ach é ag bogadh ó áit go háit. Dhein daoine ó trí scolieanna gearrán mar gheall air, ach tá seans nár tháinig na daoine ar fad go dtí [an Ord] chun cúntas a thabhairt faoin dhrochúsáid ghnéasach a bhí deanta ag an fear seo. *(Rannpháirtí)*
>
> The participant thinks that the Order knew, and that is why the Brother was moved from place to place. He also thinks that reports were made to the Department, and that they allowed this person to continue working in different schools. There were complaints from children at least three schools where the Brother worked; it is likely that there were more people who were affected but that they never came forward to report what had happened to them. *(Participant)*

G. Cultural Issues and Sexual Abuse

138. Most participants describing the culture in their school as a contributing factor in the sexual abuse they experienced. Two main themes were identified: the influential position of the Catholic Church, and in some schools, a culture of 'hyper-masculinity' and bullying.

(i) Influential position of the Catholic Church

139. Many participants made reference to the impact of attending school at a time in Ireland's history when the Catholic Church had a pervasive influence across all aspects of people's lives.

> *'It was at a time in the late 60s, early 70s. It was a completely different Ireland to the Ireland we live in now. I lived in a staunchly Catholic family' (Participant)*

140. Participants described the influence of the Church as 'omnipresent', influencing culture, values and social mores. Some participants reported having family members in the clergy or religious orders which was often seen as a source of pride for the family. Many described how parents adhered to Church teaching and instilled a deep fear in their children of contravening representatives of the Church.

> *'You had to respect teachers, your peers, and those with responsibility. You grew up with the church.' (Participant)*

'I think you just accepted it (the abuse) because of the stupid Church.' (Participant)

141. Other participants described feeling that the intertwining of the Church and State resulted in a sense that the Church controlled every aspect of their lives. This left them feeling as though there was no way that they could question the Church, or the behaviour of its representatives, and some spoke of how this influenced their parents' ability to challenge religious orders:

> He noted that *'The children of the faithful were vulnerable,'* as the strong connection to religion in the family home made it inconceivable that his story could be easily heard. *(Participant)*

142. Participants described having a sense that representatives of the Catholic Church could act with impunity, and spoke of the impact this had on society at large:

> He describes the churches' hold on Irish people as *'from the cradle to the grave'* and that this *'made slaves out of the Irish people.' (Participant)*
>
> *'There was a big sense of being at the centre of all this religious nationalism. A look outside the gates showed the clergy pretty much ran all the culture norms. It was a theocracy of sorts. Priests held a lot of power. I saw the college as an indoctrination camp.' (Participant)*

143. Participants said that sin was a topic frequently talked about and confessing sins was an important ritual in people's lives, which contributed to feelings of guilt and shame. The ritual of Confession was identified by some participants as presenting particular risk for children, as it was done at that time behind closed doors and what was said was supposed to be a secret. Some participants spoke of the influence of teachings about sin on them as children:

> *'In holy Catholic Ireland, I didn't know the difference between a sin and a crime. He burdened me with shame, guilt and responsibility. I couldn't tell anyone.' (Participant)*

144. Another participant explained his profound shock and fear on his first day at a particular school at the age of six, when a nun told him about sin:

> *'Venal, mortal etc. and that because I wasn't a good boy my soul would burn in hell.' (Participant)*

145. Participants also commented on the influence of religion in all aspects of Irish life, including schools, hospitals, elder care, industrial schools, adoptions and mother and baby homes.

(ii) Hyper-masculinity and Bullying

146. Some participants described a school culture of exaggerated masculinity, which was characterised by frequent bullying and emotional and physical abuse between staff and students. Participants described how such behaviour was encouraged between students. Some described what they saw as a perverse adult lens applied to sexual abuse, whereby priests were suggesting that it was the young people in their care who were responsible for 'leading them astray'.

> The participant recalled how, while witnessing a priest raping a friend, another priest walked in and out of the scene of the rape and proceeded to go back to the boy's classroom and referred to [the boy who was raped] as: *'A rent boy who was tempting the teachers.' (Participant)*

147. Participants described how certain traits and interests were praised and others ridiculed, with those who did not conform to exaggeratedly masculine ideals subjected to bullying. Some reported that this made them targets for physical and sexual abuse. Participants reported being pressured to participate in activities such as rugby and football, and how non-participation could result in being singled out for physical or sexual abuse by teachers or bullying by other students.

148. Some participants described being bullied by other students because they were 'favoured' or were being sexually abused by priests or other members of staff. One described how boys who were perceived to be favoured by the priests were badly bullied. He went on to describe how:

> There was lots of homophobic bullying in the school and the priests encouraged it and would regularly use language calling people *'girls'* if they got answers wrong. *(Participant)*

149. A number of participants spoke about the compound effect of being a victim of sexual abuse and being isolated by your peers as a result.

> The participant highlighted how other children in his class were similarly affected and as a group were labelled '[Name]'s benders' after the abuser. He found the abuse and bullying from his fellow classmates just as damaging as the abuse. *(Participant)*
>
> One thing that is clear in the participant's mind is the ridicule from his fellow peers. He felt that everyone was laughing about what happened. *(Participant)*

150. Another participant spoke of the atmosphere in their school:

> The participant described a highly sexualised atmosphere in the school. He lost his innocence at an early age. *(Participant)*

151. Many participants reported that bullying also included physical violence and social exclusion.

> *'I was small in school and found school quite frightening. We were always a bit on edge. I spent most of my time being nervous and afraid at school. Guys would go around thumping people in the playground.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I went from being a boy with many friends to becoming a boy on the outside. I was targeted, and bullied by fellow pupils and the reality was I did not defend myself or attempt to stop it, as I did not feel pain from the bullying. I was worthless, a piece of rubbish blowing on the footpath.' (Participant)*

152. Other participants described how bullying was a pervasive aspect of the culture.

> *'Everybody was bullied by someone: other students, teachers, priests.' (Participant)*

153. Another participant described the physical impact of ongoing bullying by staff and other students.

> The participant was *"in a daze"* for the first one and a half years at the school, experiencing significant physical bullying by older pupils, frequent nocturnal enuresis and an episode of encopresis. The younger priest in charge of the participant's dormitory was aware when the toileting issues began. *(Participant)*

H. Violence in Schools

154. Violence as a part of the culture of some schools was directly referenced by many participants and around half of all participants provided accounts of violence and sadistic behaviour by staff. These accounts of the pervasiveness of violence against children extended well beyond what might have been understood to be acceptable corporal punishment at the time. Corporal punishment was banned in schools in Ireland in 1982.[3]

155. Whilst the Terms of Reference for the Scoping Inquiry are confined to sexual abuse, participants noted the effect of cultures of violence on their ability to reveal what was happening to them, and adding to the stress and trauma that they experienced as a result of sexual abuse. The use of physical violence was reported by participants as further evidence of the power and control of those running the school, and these factors are important in understanding the overall picture of sexual abuse in that context.

3 Department of Education Circulars 5/82 and 9/82

(i) Violence and School Culture

156. Participants described the nature of the violence as having a specific character. Participants used language such as 'savagery'; 'reign of terror'; and 'hell' to describe the worlds they lived in at the time.

> The participant stressed that himself and other children lived in a state of fear as they were exposed to physical and psychological abuse at the school daily. *(Participant)*
>
> *'There was a terrible atmosphere of fear. If anyone stepped out of line, they were beaten.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant used the word 'savagery' to describe the behaviour of the teachers. *(Participant)*
>
> There was an overriding atmosphere of grotesque violence. Boys had their heads smashed against stone walls and granite lintels. One such boy who experienced this was dead by end of his 20s after becoming addicted to heroin. *(Participant)*
>
> *'That school is called Hell.' (Participant)*

157. Participants described the pervasive and arbitrary nature of physical punishment and violence in some schools. Many spoke about how witnessing violence against their classmates was a daily occurrence. One spoke of how, in a dormitory with dozens of pupils:

> … a priest used to come in the middle of the night, pull back the covers, and hit boys with a leather strap. *(Participant)*

158. A participant spoke of how students who came from outside Ireland responded to violence:

> Discipline in the school was harsh, violent and used to coerce, control and as retribution. Students would be beaten with sticks and belts. Once there were two American students at the school and they said they wouldn't tolerate being beaten as they didn't have that culture in the US. They stood up to the priest and threw his beating-stick out over railings, they looked at him and said no. It was the first time the participant saw someone stand up to abuse, which was seen as only possible because they grew up outside the culture of fear and intimidation. *(Participant)*

159. Some participants described the ritual of new staff being introduced to this culture.

> *'When a new teacher came to the school, they were told to go to the store in town and buy from a selection of canes for sale. Most teachers complied and bought a cane and brought it to use in school, and by God they used it. There were only a few decent teachers who didn't use the cane. They would break the cane and then just go and get another one.' (Participant)*

160. Many participants described boarding school as a particularly dangerous place from which there was no respite or as a place where they felt trapped.

> *'If something happens at school, what use are parents in a situation like that? You don't go home at the end of the day, it's a bit like being in a prison.' (Participant)*

161. One participant described his panic when his parents considered sending him into the boarding school where he was attended as a day pupil:

> *'I knew I couldn't say why, but I could not go into the school as a boarder. I knew if that happened, I would have no escape and I'd be abused a lot more and [Name] would have free reign over me. I was very frightened of that.' (Participant)*

(ii) Punishment and Humiliation in Schools

162. Participants described being verbally shamed by teachers and reported receiving humiliating and painful punishments. They reported that there may have been many 'reasons' that might have precipitated being publicly humiliated by a teacher, for example: for asking questions, for not knowing the answer to questions, for wearing clothes that were not new, or for not excelling in sports, as well as many others.

> *'If you asked a question, you'd get ridiculed and told "You're stupid", I suffered a lot academically and psychologically.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant was really humiliated by a teacher on a few occasions in front of the class. His history teacher repeatedly humiliated him for not having a brand-new uniform. He would have his brother's old uniform. *(Participant)*

163. Some participants described being punished and humiliated for circumstances beyond their control.

> The participant described feeling dread going to school with his broken hand. *'Every morning, he held my hand in the air. "Did you do your homework?" Every morning, having my breakfast, I was thinking about what was ahead of me with the hand.' (Participant)*

164. Participants described being publicly humiliated by nuns or priests in primary schools. Some participants said they were made to strip naked or made to wear embarrassing underwear, whereupon other classmates were encouraged to ridicule and shame them.

> One other incident that the participant recalled, was a time when he asked if he could use the bathroom. He was refused and as a result he soiled his pants. *(Participant)*

This participant went on to describe being made to stand in underwear with other pupils encouraged to ridicule and humiliate him. He added:

> Furthermore, there were regular underwear checks for poo stains, standing in line. He was always treated as a 'bad' child, and was bullied by others, which was encouraged by the nuns. *(Participant)*

Another participant described how:

> *'I was made to sit naked in class for an entire day after wetting myself. I was frequently hit with the ruler. This started at three years old to five.' (Participant)*

165. Participants reported cruel punishments such as being forced to eat their own vomit or being locked in enclosed spaces for long periods of time.

> *'If you didn't like anything they'd force feed you and make you eat it, even the sick. They used to hit us with wooden spoons.' (Participant)*

(iii) Descriptions of Violent Assault of Children

166. Some participants reported incidents where they believed that teachers appeared to be gaining sexual gratification while beating other children in the class.

> The participant recalled 'priests who were visibly erect while giving a beating to a child.' (Participant)

167. Many participants reported specific accounts of physical assault by teachers, heads of their schools and other members of staff. Participants described being slapped across the hands and face, being punched, kicked and beaten. They discussed their experience of serious injuries including broken bones, head injuries and damage to internal organs. They described being hit with rulers, bats, hurleys and various forms of leather straps which were often reinforced with studs or metal, including old pennies. Some participants reported being restrained, or their hands were pinned as they were hit with implements or pinned against surfaces as they were beaten.

168. Participants also described being punched with force in the stomach, or kicked by members of religious orders, spontaneously, as they walked down corridors. Other recollections included being hit or beaten for no reason and for reasons such as coming second in a competition, attempting to intervene or protect other students from punishment, incomplete homework and resisting sexual assault. Some participants referenced being beaten as a way of distracting other people's attention from sexual abuse:

> *'The head Brother apologised to me for having to use the strap on me in the classroom as he was concerned that the other pupils may discover our "special relationship" if he didn't use it.' (Participant)*

169. Some participants reported resisting sexual or physical assaults, which they said generally resulted in an escalation of violence against them, sometimes causing serious harm.

> *'He beat the be-Jaysus out of me. The biffer*[4] *went across my face and left a mark. I paid the price for being defiant.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant spent several years facing a rapist daily, even hourly. Eventually, the participant stood up to the abuse in class and thumped him. This resulted in [Name] bashing the participant's head off the desk to the point of concussion. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant recalls being 'hammered' on several occasions and described himself as being a bit of a rebel. He was punished one night by being sent to sleep in a shed with sick calves, as it was a freezing night he moved the infra-red lamp to heat himself and was punished for this the following day. *(Participant)*

170. Other participants reported seeing other students being seriously harmed, concussed or sustaining broken bones while being physically abused.

> 'He was a man who was very, very dangerous. He beat another child to a pulp, and three of us had to carry him to a doctor.' (Participant)

171. This participant further explained:

> *'He absolutely annihilated me every day I walked into that school. He beat me, he fractured my skull … He would degrade you to nothing. He would pull out your hairs. They used these rubber belts with lead inside them so it wouldn't mark you, they would get you with their knuckles in your ribs. They would get you any way they could.' (Participant)*

4 A biffer is a term used for a handmade leather strap with metal inserts.

'One teacher broke a student's arm. It was a boarding school and lots of kids were abandoned there.' (Participant)

'He was a frightening, frightening man. I saw him beating, not disciplining, beating a kid around the class. He would just go nuts. We were ten, eleven-year-old kids and I was absolutely in fear of this man.' (Participant)

'I saw a young fella being kicked on the ground by a Brother; he caught him, flung him on the ground, and kicked him on the ground, raining kicks into him. The physical brutality was regular, and that scarred a lot of people too. And obviously was far more prevalent (than sexual abuse).' (Participant)

172. Some participants described the casual and spontaneous nature of violence which could erupt for no reason, and which left them feeling terrorised.

> On the third day of starting at the school, a priest came out of nowhere and punched the participant in the stomach which caused an asthma attack. He collapsed to the ground and gasped for air, not knowing what he'd done wrong. He was terrified. *(Participant)*

173. Another participant recounted a similar experience where he was asked to stand up and was brought out of a room to a corridor outside by a staff member.

> The [member of the religious order] told the participant to look up into his eyes, then hit the participant's face and smashed it into the wall. *(Participant)*

174. Many participants reported experiencing or witnessing sustained violence in their schools by members of staff. Participants described the details of specific individuals' particular methods.

> [The Priest] used to behave like a shot-putter or a javelin thrower, taking two strides back to maximise the impact of the blows. *'Some of these beatings were so severe that they split my hands open, and I wasn't even taken to the Infirmary.' (Participant)*

175. Participants reported that even when parents complained to the school, the beatings continued or escalated.

> His mother went to school to confront the perpetrator, but the abuse only got worse. *'When she left, the perpetrator said that I will never forget him. I can tell you I got some fucking beatings.' (Participant)*

176. Because of the pervasive threat of violence in some schools, participants described developing various strategies to avoid beatings when they could, such as urinating in jars at night so they wouldn't have to leave their dorm or cubicle.

You were not allowed to make any noise once you were in your dorm. If you needed to get up to go to the toilet you were beaten. What the pupils in the dorm used to do to save themselves from the beatings was they would keep a coffee jar next to their beds and use these to go to the toilet. *(Participant)*

177. Others spoke about the enduring and lasting impact it had on them.

'He was ruthless and calculated in everything he did. He was cruel and sadistic. I wasn't in the 'high end' of the abuse, but it was still horrific. It shapes you forever. From that day on, I locked it away. It hasn't been spoken about since.' (Participant)

I. Chapter Summary

178. This chapter outlined participants' descriptions of their experience of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders and the often violent cultures in which those experiences occurred. The vivid and harrowing descriptions of what participants said they experienced as children indicates the extent and nature of sexual abuse in some schools and suggests that a climate of fear prevailed in many cases.

179. Participants described sexual abuse taking place in classrooms, dormitories, offices, corridors, swimming pools, sports facilities and showers, amongst other locations. In many cases, participants described these experiences as occurring in front of other children, both overtly and in a concealed manner. Participants reported sexual abuse occurring both on and off school grounds, on school trips and sometimes in the participants' own family homes. In some cases, participants described the behaviour of those engaged in sexual abuse as 'brazen'.

180. Participants described several forms of abuse, including groping, digital penetration, oral, anal and vaginal rape. Some participants reported incidences of multiple children being sexually abused at the same time. In many cases participants reported that they had experienced ongoing sexual abuse of different forms. Some reported being sexually abused by more than one person. Across the whole range of accounts given in the Survivor Engagement process, participants described sexual abuse occurring in all corners of some schools and in all aspects of school life. They explained that for many, as children, nowhere was safe and this was particularly the case for those in boarding schools.

181. Many participants described being weighed down by shame and guilt and the mistaken feeling that what was happening was somehow their fault. Their experience was the feeling that the burden of sexual abuse was theirs to carry. Several described feeling in some way responsible for what was done to them, a feeling which persisted for many years for some participants.

182. Many participants said that, as children, they felt they could not tell what was happening to them. Participants described multiple factors that prevented them from disclosing what was happening, including threats of, and actual, violence, fear of the power of the Church and its representatives, coercion and a feeling that they would not be believed, whether by parents or others. Participants spoke of the influence of religion in society and their feeling that there was no way to break free from sexual abuse in a situation where those responsible had power and control, directly in their lives and in society more generally.

183. Participants described many strategies used to gain access to children, and how they felt that in some instances, the individual circumstances of a particular child resulted in their being singled out. Grooming of children was reported by many participants. They spoke of teachers and staff members who inveigled their way into children's lives by involving themselves in extracurricular activities, exploiting children's interests and taking them on trips and overnight excursions. Several spoke of how relationships were built with children's families to gain access to the child for the purposes of sexual abuse. Parents were often flattered and grateful for the attention their child or family was receiving, and this was described as making it even more difficult for children in those circumstances to tell anyone what was happening.

184. Many participants said that they did not tell anyone about the abuse, as they did not understand what was happening, and did not have the words with which to tell someone. Some participants said they did tell their parents and were believed. In many cases parents tried to intervene, usually through direct contact with the school authorities. However, participants were unable to identify any situation in which they were aware of any real consequences, at the time, for the person who abused them. Some referred to convictions in later years.

185. Participants described their view that the existence of sexual abuse and predatory behaviour was common knowledge among students and by at least some of the staff in particular schools. Participants described a general lack of response from school leaders to reports of sexual abuse except for the movement of those responsible from one school or institution to another.

186. Participants described a culture of exaggerated masculinity, physical violence and bullying in some schools. Participants spoke of being afraid every day that they went to school and of how physical and sexual abuse often coincided.

187. This chapter has provided an overview of the main themes arising directly from participants' accounts of what happened to them as children in day and boarding schools run by religious orders. Participants described appalling sexual abuse of children in their schools and the profound fear that they experienced. The next chapter reports what participants said about the impact of these devastating experiences on their childhood and adolescence.

Chapter 5:
Participant Accounts of the Impact of Sexual Abuse on their Childhood and Adolescence

Content Warning: This chapter contains details of participants' descriptions of sexual abuse, physical violence and reference to suicide. It may be distressing to read.

A. Introduction

1. This chapter of the report outlines how participants described the impact of sexual abuse on their childhood up to the age of 18, in how they felt about themselves; how they engaged with school and extracurricular activities; their relationships with family and friends; and their mental health.
2. In this chapter, the Scoping Inquiry is reporting the information provided by 149 participants during the course of their interviews with trauma-informed facilitators or in written submissions.

(i) Specific Effects on Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

3. Participants described a range of impacts including many symptoms of stress and trauma commonly seen in people who have experienced child sexual abuse (CSA), and which bring particular difficulties for survivors. One established framework for examining impact of CSA, the Traumagenic Dynamics Model[1], explains the various ways in which children can be affected. This framework suggests four specific dynamics that contribute to the damaging effects of child sexual abuse:

    - **Traumatic Sexualization:** This refers to the distortion of the child's sexual development as a result of the abuse. It involves premature or inappropriate exposure to sexual behaviours, knowledge, or experiences which can confuse and disrupt the child's understanding of healthy sexuality.
    - **Stigmatisation:** Stigmatisation occurs when the child feels shame, guilt, or self-blame as a result of sexual abuse. The child may internalize negative beliefs about themselves, feeling responsible for the abuse or believe they are somehow flawed or unworthy, sometimes called 'damaged goods' syndrome.
    - **Betrayal:** Betrayal refers to the violation of trust that occurs when someone in a position of authority, or a trusted caregiver, abuses a child. The child may have relied on the abuser for care, protection, and guidance, and the betrayal of that trust can have profound psychological effects.
    - **Powerlessness:** Powerlessness refers to the child's sense of helplessness and lack of control during the abuse. The child is often unable to stop or escape the abusive situation, leading to feelings of powerlessness, fear, and vulnerability.

1 Finkelhor, D., & Browne, A, The Traumatic Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Conceptualization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1985, 55(4), 530-541.

4. These four traumatic dynamics interact and reinforce each other, creating a cumulative or 'snowball' effect of psychological and emotional harm. These kinds of effects were described by participants who spoke to the Survivor Engagement team, where one problematic impact would lead to another, which in turn set off further problems, all of which were described as causing ongoing distress. For example: fear of going to class affected school performance, which in turn affected relationships with parents, who had often made sacrifices to send them to particular schools. This in turn caused a sense of shame and guilt, which then caused isolation and loneliness, damaging identity of self and impacting relationships with peers.
5. Both male and female survivors of child sexual abuse described their experiences during the Survivor Engagement process, with the overwhelming majority being male. Research indicates that the impact of child sexual abuse on boys and girls differs in some ways. For many boys and men, their self-identity and concept of masculinity can be challenged by sexual abuse, and this can lead to self-doubts about many issues, including sexuality. The effects described by participants in this chapter are perfectly in keeping with the normal reactions that children have to abnormal and traumatic experiences.
6. One of the most common impacts of sexual abuse described by participants was the premature end of their childhood. Many said that their sense of safety, happiness and trust in the world was replaced by chronic fear and sadness. Participants spoke of adverse effects on their identity and development at a formative age, describing how shock and fear led to hypervigilance. Participants described deep feelings of shame, decimated self-esteem and a sense that they were somehow responsible for what was happening.
7. Secrecy and shame were described as having a significant impact on their relationships with their friends, parents and others. Many participants said they hid their abuse from their parents. Others described feeling abandoned and angry if they did say something, but parents were unable to protect them. Participants reported difficulties in their relationship with their parents, as reduced academic attainment and school avoidance was, in some cases, perceived as laziness or rebellious behaviour. Many participants said that their experience of sexual abuse affected how they related to others, and they spoke of isolating themselves or avoiding friendships or close relationships. Participants noted that trusting other adults became very difficult.
8. Some participants recounted how their own developing sexuality was damaged, because they associated sex with disgust, discomfort and guilt, and how in their teens and early adulthood this often resulted in the avoidance of age-appropriate relationships.

9. A majority of participants reported that their experience of sexual abuse had an immediate, adverse impact on their interest and engagement in school, on their ability to learn, and consequently on their overall academic performance. They described how school changed, for many overnight, from being a place they looked forward to and enjoyed, to one where they felt trapped and terrified.

10. Most participants described significant impacts on their mental health in their childhood and youth, beginning immediately or shortly after experiencing sexual abuse. In most cases, these mental health issues followed participants into adulthood. Use of alcohol or drugs to numb painful feelings was cited by many participants as a coping strategy. Many spoke of their own suicidal ideation or attempts at suicide, and referred to friends or peers whom they suspected had died by suicide as a result of sexual abuse.

11. Several participants described experiencing physical health difficulties that were direct physical consequences of the abuse, including physical damage, vascular damage and deafness or tinnitus due to being beaten.

12. It is important to note that not all participants chose or were able to speak to us about the impact of sexual abuse on their childhood. In keeping with the Survivor Engagement process's trauma-informed approach, facilitators may have gently prompted on some overall themes, but participants were not asked specific questions about the impact of sexual abuse on their childhood. Not all participants spoke of the issues outlined below, but the accounts documented here reflect the most common effects experienced and shared by participants.

13. The sections which follow prioritise the voices of participants and their descriptions of the impact of sexual abuse on their lives, reflecting what participants said to the team. As outlined elsewhere, both direct verbatim quotes (in italics) and summary information from participants' interview notes (indented) are used. The quotes and extracts from interview notes are anonymised and care has been taken to ensure that, whilst individual participants may recognise their own voices, we have not included names or details that could potentially identify the participant or any other person.

B. Loss of Childhood and Impact on Sense of Self

14. Almost all participants shared their experience of two far-reaching effects of sexual abuse – the loss of their childhood, almost overnight, and the damage done to their personal development.

(i) An Abrupt End to Childhood

15. Most participants reported a negative impact on their sense of self, with an adverse effect on their developing identity during childhood and early youth. Participants explained how the disruption hindered their emotional development, and, for many, led to insecurity, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.

16. Participants described how their experience of abuse abruptly destroyed their perception of the world as a relatively safe place. Some recalled an immediate end to their unselfconscious experience of childhood, which can otherwise be understood as a time of relatively carefree innocence, optimism, and curiosity. Participants described experiencing a drastic change in their life:

> *'We were singing and laughing little kids, then that's the day my childhood ended.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It robbed me of my childhood, the joy of things was taken. It was taken twice: when my mother died and then by him. It was taken off me completely, there was no way back. I used to enjoy kicking around a ball and messing about.' (Participant 78)*
>
> *'At 12 years of age, my childhood was gone out the door.' (Participant)*
>
> *'My childhood ended as fast as it began. The physical, but emotional, mental pain of the first rape is as real today as then. I withdrew into myself, I became emotionally empty. I was screaming on the inside with anger and fear, but no one could hear or see me.' (Participant)*

17. Participants recounted a shift in understanding of the world, from feeling it to be a safe place to one where they felt afraid and unsafe, and this impacted how participants navigated their daily life.

> *'I lost my naïve view of the world; it became a lot greyer – the world became a dangerous place to be.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I was one minute living a great childhood then this was snatched from me. My days became, what I can say, a dark cloudy grey place with no colour, life or growth.' (Participant)*

(ii) The Sense of Self

18. Some participants described how their experience of sexual abuse impacted their concept of self and obstructed development of their identity during the formative years of childhood and early puberty. Participants described how this often left them feeling that they did not know who they were; or that they were pretending to be someone they were not. One man said that he reinvented a new version of himself after each incident of abuse.

'I invented a persona when I was a child and I still use this persona. I don't show that I am fragile.' (Participant)

'I changed my whole personality at the time to deal and cope with it. You become hard. You become a different person to deal with it. Otherwise, it subsumes you. You're not yourself.' (Participant)

19. Participants described negative impacts on self-confidence, self-esteem and ability to engage with friends throughout their youth. Additionally, many reported that their perception of normal and healthy boundaries was disturbed.

'I don't think I was free to make friends because I was so focused on needing to survive, and the best way to do this was to keep to myself.' (Participant)

20. Other participants explained how their experience of sexual abuse stopped their emotional development entirely. They discussed how this kept them locked into childlike ways of relating, unable to mature appropriately. One participant said that it had ruined his whole life and he had never progressed past childhood. Another explained that her emotional development was stopped at a very young age, and she experienced the emotional responses of a young child when encountering challenging situations later in life.

C. The Impact of Shame on Childhood and Adolescence

21. Reports of feelings of shame formed a consistent theme in participants' descriptions of the emotional impact of sexual abuse. Many reported feeling disgusted by what happened and, in many cases, felt in some way responsible for the sexual abuse they suffered. For many, this led to a significant level of self-blame, self-loathing and deep feelings of worthlessness.

(i) Self-Esteem/Confidence

22. Intense shame was described by many participants as an emotional experience which was closely connected to a fear of being exposed as 'worthless' or inherently 'bad', and to feelings of self-disgust. Many participants explained that they were made to feel responsible for what happened:

'I didn't know how I got myself into this mess and I didn't know how I could get out of it.' (Participant).

'I didn't know what to do. I was afraid because he told me this was our secret.' (Participant)

'I was angry at him for what he was doing and for making me feel so small and vulnerable. But I was angry with myself for allowing it to happen.' (Participant)

23. Other participants said that they had believed as children that they were somehow responsible for what happened because they had dressed in a certain way or done something to attract attention.

> As a child and throughout the abuse, the participant didn't understand what sexual abuse was and felt as if it was his own fault for wearing short trousers. *(Participant)*

24. Others described feeling shame about what had happened, feeling as though they were in some way guilty. Participants described feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, as well as impaired trust, self-blame, self-loathing and a deep belief that there was something innately wrong with them. A participant described the sense of shame:

> *'The next morning, I woke up totally ashamed of myself. I could no longer trust myself to do the right thing.' (Participant)*

25. He went on to explain.

> *'It takes very little to shame a child for the rest of its life. I had to wait 52 years to finally be able to forgive and love myself.' (Participant)*

26. Other participants expressed similar feelings:

> *'You believe that there's something wrong with you, something dirty about you.' (Participant)*
>
> *'You didn't develop with any sort of confidence […] You were made to feel useless all the time.' (Participant)*

(ii) Social Interaction

27. Many participants described how their relationships with others were significantly negatively impacted due to insecurity, lack of trust in others and withdrawing from social life in order to hide what was happening.

> *'I was still very separate from my peers. I never went to a disco. I didn't have any friends.' (Participant)*

28. Some said that, in order to feel liked and accepted, they developed a habit of people-pleasing.

> *'I've never had good friends. I was a yes person; I spent 44 years doing whatever people wanted.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I would be a people-pleaser in that I would find that I would try to let people hear what they want to hear as opposed to what I might wish to express myself.' (Participant)*

29. Others spoke about how this method of coping meant they saw it as their role to bear maltreatment from others.

> *'The whole thing was I just wanted to be loved and I would do anything to be loved and would allow people to treat me horrendously because I didn't know any better. I was like a narcissist's dream because all I wanted to do is fix things and make people love me because I felt so low, I felt so shit, I felt so worthless.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It left me damaged psychologically in terms of my self-esteem. And that's something that I have never got over, even to this day' (Participant)*

30. A number of participants described how their destroyed self-esteem and self-confidence impacted on how they behaved in groups, where they tended to avoid conflicts, neglecting their own needs and opinions.

> *'One of the negatives for me from this was that I tended to overemphasise/overinvest in someone else's point of view and place myself far down in the pecking order.' (Participant)*

(iii) Social Withdrawal and Isolation

31. Many participants described how shame led to them withdrawing from the world in general, and from other people in particular. Often this meant withdrawing from friends and ceasing to socialise, preferring to stay at home by themselves as much as possible. One man described how, on Sundays, he would stay at home when the family went for a drive and ice-cream. Another said he became increasingly introverted and found it hard to deal with reality.

> *'… went from a person who was outgoing to a person who wouldn't go out the door. It was literally, lock yourself into the living room and stay in front of the TV for the evening.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I just wanted to stay in my room away from all humans.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant grew much more introverted as a result of the abuse: '*I found it hard to meet and greet people … I'd back away*'. *(Participant)*

32. Participants described feeling increasingly separate and different from their peers, and how self-isolation became a means of protecting themselves. Participants spoke of how the determination to hide what was happening made close relationships difficult.

33. One account described how the participant found it difficult to be in any kind of one-to-one situation with people and found it difficult to talk about himself:

> *'I became very secretive. I was concealing so much through that time.' (Participant)*

34. Another said that as a young person, he struggled to maintain friendships, during and after his experience of sexual abuse:

> *'I found it difficult to make friends because I did not want anyone else to find out my shameful secret.' (Participant)*

Another participant described how:

> As a young person he struggled to maintain friendships, during and after the abuse. He spoke of feeling lonely, isolated, and confused. *(Participant)*

(iv) Loss of Trust in Others

35. Participants said that their reduced trust impacted them in relationships and in social situations. This was described as particularly acute in relation to adults, who no longer represented consistency, reliability or safety. Participants said they became afraid to make themselves vulnerable to the power and influence of other people, when this could be used so harmfully. Many shied away from relationships in order to keep themselves safe.

> *'You didn't make friends at boarding school because that might make you vulnerable.' (Participant)*

36. One participant spoke of difficulty connecting with other students and the extreme loneliness that he experienced as he disconnected from what was happening around him, describing how he frequently:

> *'Just sat gazing into the abyss.' (Participant).*

37. Another spoke of isolation:

> The participant explained how he kept a distance from other students and was nervous around other people, because he preferred to remain isolated from others and he was trying to keep himself safe and protected. *(Participant)*

38. Another participant echoed the feeling of needing to stay away from people and described how he was:

> *'… living in fear the whole time.' (Participant)*

39. Participants reported that the desire to keep a safe distance was particularly focused on non-parental adults, such as teachers and priests, and others in positions of authority in school, as participants felt they could no longer be trusted.

40. Another participant described a continual fear of being abused and a deep suspicion of adults, as he was continually wondering if they were sexual abusers. As such he found it very difficult to trust adults:

> *'Maybe they are not all they appear to be on the surface.' (Participant)*

(v) Relationships with Parents

41. Some participants spoke about the adverse impact of sexual abuse on their relationship with their parents throughout their childhood. In some cases, they described the relationship fracturing as parents perceived the child's altered behaviour as carelessness or rebellion. School avoidance or academic failure caused upset for parents and in many cases, this further damaged the relationship.

> The participant was being punished at home by his father and also in school by the Brothers for not doing well in his grades. This had a huge impact on his relationship with his father. No one asked what had happened to the bright, enthusiastic learner who had done so well the year before. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant felt that he had disappointed his mother by leaving school early and regretted this. *'My mother was so disappointed, really disappointed.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant dropped out of [name of school], this had an impact on his relationship with his mother as she felt he had failed and walked away. *(Participant)*

42. Some participants described how they did not want to attend their parents' choice of school, but were sent anyway and this impacted on their relationships:

> *'I became estranged from my mother because I blamed her for sending me to that school. I didn't want to go there.' (Participant)*

43. In other cases, the parent/child relationship was described as being impacted by the child blaming the parents for not protecting them from the abuse. Participants described how in some cases, this was because parents did not see the signs of sexual abuse:

> He called him 'lazy', and 'a liar' and was very violent towards him and their relationship changed dramatically [after he disclosed the abuse to his father]. *(Participant)*

44. Some participants described a sense of disconnection or estrangement from parents and families. This was described as being a result of the enforced secrecy about what was happening.

> *'After [the abuse], I was disconnected from family, and I still am today.' (Participant)*

45. One participant described how:

> The impact of being warned not to tell his parents changed the participant's relationship with them, especially his father. From that point onwards, there was a line drawn between the participant and his parents in terms of secrecy around his life at boarding school. *(Participant)*

46. Another participant described how he worked from an early age and tried to avoid his parents and other people. He described acting in ways to try to get expelled from school and to create distance from his parents, and how, when dealing with his parents he would think:

> *'Will you please stop loving me. Hate me. Send me off.' (Participant)*

(vi) Sexual Development

47. Participants discussed how their perceptions of their sexuality as adolescents and young people were impacted by sexual abuse, describing how some had limited capacity to fully understand sexual feelings and thoughts. This led to confusion about the difference between consensual and non-consensual sexual activity. One participant spoke about how he was confused about whether what was happening was right or wrong.

48. Participants described how they experienced negative feelings about their sexuality and sexual development, which manifested in various ways, including a sensation of being robbed of their sexuality, a disinterest in dating or age-appropriate romantic relationships, and for a smaller group, overly sexualised behaviours. Participants were clear that difficulties coping with their own developing sexuality were due to associating sex with disgust, discomfort and guilt.

49. Some participants described the impact on their sexual development:

> *'The experience twisted my perception of normal sexuality. It made me feel that sex is a bad thing.' (Participant)*
>
> *'My virginity was taken from me, the exploration of sex for a young adolescent boy – my sexual life was taken from me.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant described his exploration of his sexuality at that time as all the more difficult because of the abuse that he had experienced. He found it uncomfortable spending time in dressing rooms with other boys undressing as he was becoming aware of his sexuality. *(Participant)*

50. For many, challenges in relation to sexual identity were described, and the impact of this on their ability to form romantic and sexual connections lasted well into adulthood, affecting their relationships and family life throughout their lives. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

D. Impact on School Life

51. The majority of participants reported how the sexual abuse had an immediate adverse impact on their interest and engagement in school, their ability to learn, and consequently their overall academic performance. Participants who described themselves as bright and enthusiastic students told how their grades and exam results spiralled downward following the first instance of abuse, and how dreams and ambitions to pursue further education and careers gradually faded or were impeded as academic performance declined.

52. Many explained how a prevailing sense of fear and anxiety at school blocked their ability to concentrate on learning or engage in extracurricular activities. Participants described how their attempts to avoid particular teachers or adults impacted on their schoolwork including skipping after-school homework, escaping school as fast as possible or avoiding going to school at all. Some also reported that they deliberately dropped their grades in order to avoid attention in situations where they felt that academically successful students were targeted for sexual abuse.

(i) Learning and Educational Outcomes

53. The majority of participants described the detrimental impact of sexual abuse on their education:

> *'You're in fear of your life, you couldn't study properly. You were waiting for him to call you at night.' (Participant)*
>
> *'My whole experience of primary education was of utter fear from the time I entered first class to sixth class.' (Participant)*

54. Participants who described themselves as promising, bright students saw very significant deterioration in their grades and educational outcomes. As participants described, the abuse rapidly destroyed the self-confidence that was needed to do well in school.

> *'I can't read and write. They knocked the confidence out of me.' (Participant)*

55. One participant described how, prior to their experience of sexual abuse, a teacher said of them that:

> *'Anything I did, I always did well.' (Participant)*

56. However, after the abuse their academic work suffered:

> *'I had no confidence. I had tons of ability, but never got anywhere.' (Participant)*

57. One participant described how his self-confidence was impacted before a major examination when he was told by a teacher that he should not bother sitting the exams. He described how the teacher said:

> *'You're worth nothing.' (Participant)*

58. One participant spoke of the person he was before the abuse took place:

> He described himself as joyful, religious, and enjoyed school. He was academic and innocent and had great trust in priests. After the abuse, the participant felt a darkness enter his world. He was on edge, anxious, fearful and was on guard. He lived in a heightened state of fear, within the atmosphere of the school and this impacted his ability to study and concentrate. *(Participant)*

59. Another described how his interest in studying or further education was impacted:

> The participant explained that this molestation became the overriding feature of his experience in class, as opposed to education. *(Participant)*

60. Others described being aware that abuse was happening to fellow pupils in the classroom during class time and living in fear of being next. Some participants spoke about a constant state of alertness, scanning rooms for potential exits. Another participant felt being on-guard all the time was an:

> *'Incredibly unsettling process.' (Participant)*

61. Many participants reported that their experience of sexual abuse reduced their opportunities to attend further education and then to progress into a career of their choice. Participants explained that poor exam results, low confidence, or complete dislike of anything school-related, limited their opportunities. Some reported that a drastic negative impact on their academic performance and grades meant that they were not able to continue with their education at all.

62. One participant described how he was high-achieving academically and in sports but the impact of sexual abuse as a young teenager impacted dramatically on school performance:

> His ability to engage academically declined to the point that the participant failed seven leaving certificate subjects, passing only two. He left school with no qualifications. *(Participant)*

63. Sexual abuse was described as having had a significant impact on the ability of participants to succeed academically. One participant described how he had done well academically up until the abuse and had come from a high-achieving family. This participant went to describe how his potential was impacted by the abuse and how he could not pursue some of his interests as a result. He added that he did not pass the leaving certificate exams.

Another participant described the detrimental impact of abuse on their education:

> Because of the abuse, the participant's interest in school waned, he fell behind and he finally dropped out of school at the age of 12 or 13. *(Participant)*

64. Some participants noted how suffering from mental health issues, such as trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder ('PTSD'), made it impossible for them to follow their initial academic interests and goals.

> *'Everything from being a top student and athlete; all that became unsustainable with PTSD. My aspiration to be a doctor and top-level rugby player was all gone.' (Participant)*

65. Several participants spoke about how sexual abuse made them despise school and lose any interest in continuing their education.

> *'I couldn't get out of school quick enough every day. I adored school and then I hated it. When I transitioned into [name of school] I switched off completely. That day academia left my body forever. Further education was a no-no. Third level was never an option for me.' (Participant)*

66. Most of the participants who spoke about the impact on education and development did so with significant sadness and regret. Some emphasised a feeling of having been robbed of an opportunity to flourish academically and personally.

> *'I feel that what happened to me has resulted in lost potential.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I have regrets, I'm not a judge or a barrister, there could be so much more that I could have done. It destroyed my life and the direction I was going in.' (Participant)*

67. One participant spoke of how he had planned to become an architect but was never able to progress his academic career. The participant stated:

> *'I was denied an education.' (Participant)*

(ii) Strategies to Avoid Sexual Abuse

68. Participants explained how they developed strategies to avoid sexual abuse such as avoiding particular areas of the school where they felt vulnerable, getting together with the "tougher" children in the school, or by disengaging from academic work or sports if they thought that this would allow them to avoid particular people or situations. Participants described their feelings that these strategies had a detrimental impact on their engagement with school activities, academic performance and grades.

69. Participants described trying to avoid attracting attention as far as possible:

> *'I was quiet, and I kept in the shadows, in class I put my head down.' (Participant)*

> *'I did my best from the day I went to the school to keep my head under the parapet as much as possible and blend in. I didn't participate in anything I didn't have to. I was forced to participate in rugby, which I loathed. I had a very, very small group of good friends who are still good friends. But I did my best to be in the school as little as possible.' (Participant)*

70. Another account explained that the participant was an academic child who enjoyed learning, but all that fell away in the early years of secondary school.

> The participant began to spend time with the 'tougher' kids at the school in order to keep the teacher away from him. Spending time with 'tougher kids' had a negative impact on the participant's studies and resulted in him being exposed to illegal activities from a young age, such as alcohol and drugs. *(Participant)*

71. Some participants described an awareness amongst pupils that certain people or places were unsafe, and so they organised their school day to avoid those individuals or spaces which consumed much of their energy and focus.

> 'I would have never gone in the showers, I felt unsafe.' (Participant)

> 'As children we were aware, you wouldn't want to be here and there with certain priests.' (Participant)

> 'I decided to keep a wide berth from him.' (Participant)

72. Participants gave up activities such as sports or swimming as the sexual abuse took place around changing rooms or other such areas. Others stayed away from school whenever possible:

'My reaction to it was to avoid hanging around school, but there was also no one at home in the afternoons. There was a lot of trying to find out how I could make sure I was not alone at any time and how I could avoid getting into trouble. This threat of getting into trouble was pervasive. They knew my family situation. It was an unspoken rule at the time that you didn't say anything to a priest. We were afraid of teachers, priests and other authority figures. You might get into trouble.' (Participant)

'He never touched me again after that because I never let him. I avoided him like the plague.' (Participant)

73. Participants described how their purpose in school gradually shifted from learning and growing into purely surviving, and how school became a place associated with fear. These participants also described how they carried the emotional weight of sexual abuse when they were not in the school; weekends and holidays became a temporary safe space, and they spoke of dreading the day they had to return.

> The participant said that the holidays felt like a safe haven. When it was time to go back to school after the holidays, in the two weeks before he would break out in hives and sweats, all at the thought of having to go back to what he called a prison. *(Participant)*

74. Others explained how they would make attempts to avoid going to school at all by pretending to be sick or, in some cases, hurting themselves to avoid having to go back. One participant described how they started mitching from school, until eventually he had to leave the school.

> *'The things built up in me.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I would pretend I was sick so as not to be sent to school, any excuse to stay home.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I didn't go to school half the time. (Participant)*
>
> *'My learning ended as it was not a school but a place of living hell, abuse, rape, pain, fear'. (Participant)*

75. Some participants recounted attempts to avoid school resulting in serious consequences – one described how, at home for the summer holidays:

> He had thrown himself in front of a car in the hope that he would be sufficiently injured to prevent his return to school. He spent months planning the spot where he would do this to be sure that he would be hit. *(Participant)*

76. Another spoke of how he ran away from boarding school one night and arrived home to discover that his parents were away. Within an hour of his arrival at the family home, a relative arrived and drove him back to the school that he had run away from.

Another participant described their experience of trying to avoid abuse by not going to school:

> A participant recounted that the School Attendance Officer came out a few times and said that they would send him to a reform school if he didn't come to school. When back in school he would be locked in the classroom during break times, with the Brother who had abused him. He remembers looking out towards the door praying that somebody would come in to rescue him. *(Participant)*

77. Some participants described how as they grew older and stronger, they were less likely to be targeted. One participant explained how being slightly older helped him to deal with the situation:

> *'I was probably 15 at the time so I could, relatively speaking, deal with it appropriately and pretty much everyone knew what type of man he was, so I avoided further contact alone with him.' (Participant)*

78. Some participants spoke of how children tried to warn each other or protect each other from sexual abuse, although some referenced not fully understanding what was happening.

> *'Later, I was told by other boys to make sure I did not go to this priest's room. I sensed they meant it was dangerous but did not have any real idea of what they were talking about.' (Participant)*

79. The participant said he knew there was something not quite right at the time but was not sure what that was:

> *'I had a sense from the other boys they knew not to go to his room. I had missed out on that knowledge.' (Participant)*

Others described similar experiences:

> *'It is amazing how some children will try to protect other children.' (Participant)*
>
> He was told to watch out for certain staff by other boys, and to avoid getting trapped in a room with them. Boys would say 'watch him, don't get trapped'. *(Participant)*
>
> The boys told each other not end up in an office on your own with a particular priest because of how handsy he was in the open. *(Participant)*

80. Participants explained how students would have collective strategies to avoid being alone with particular teachers or staff members. These included making sure all teachers' cars had gone before leaving the school, agreeing to meet prior to going to class or not going into the class until a group had gathered.

> If the abuser ever tried to stop the participant and ask for a private word, his friends would say *'Let's go.' (Participant)*
>
> *'We were young, we would meet at the corner to go in together to protect ourselves. I was afraid of my fucking life.' (Participant)*

81. Participants described how the time and energy invested in avoiding dangerous situations at school, or the outright avoidance of school altogether, impacted negatively on educational attainment for many.

E. Impact on Mental and Physical Health

(i) Significant and Lasting Effect on Mental Health

82. The majority of participants described significant adverse impact on their mental health in their childhood and youth. Many spoke of how the impact of mental illness and ongoing mental health issues stayed with them into adulthood and in some cases, persist to this day. A wide range of effects were reported, including anger, loneliness, isolation, insecurity, inability to sleep, bedwetting, anxiety, panic attacks, eating disorders, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

> *'The effects of the abuse were lifelong, including frequent flashbacks, nightmares, loss of sleep, ongoing embarrassment, shame, questioning what if, and psychological and emotional hurt and damage.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Fear has been with me for a lifetime.' (Participant)*

83. While some long-term clinical psychiatric conditions such as PTSD were typically not diagnosed until adulthood, participants spoke about a range of mental health problems that began immediately or shortly after the abuse. In many cases, participants said they turned from being a happy young person into an extremely unhappy one and the impact on their mental health was described as profound. In most cases, the mental health problems described in childhood followed them into adulthood.

> The abuse destroyed the participant's self-esteem and confidence, and he suffered from depression as a result. *(Participant)*

84. Many participants who reported poor mental health shared accounts of how their constant state of fear led to ongoing severe anxiety and/or constant hypervigilance.

> *'I was very nervous. I was always afraid to be on my own, to sleep on my own. I think maybe that [the abuse] was a part of it. I didn't like to be in the dark.' (Participant)*
>
> A participant further explained how he grew hypervigilant and would always look for exits and escape plans upon entering a room. This has persisted till today. *(Participant)*

85. Some participants described being prescribed medication for depression at very young ages. One participant detailed how he experienced debilitating panic attacks and became bedridden, before being sent to a psychiatric hospital in his teens where he was locked in a ward with adults, and described how he:

> *'Just had unmitigated fear and anxiety over almost everything.' (Participant)*

(ii) Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts

86. Participants reported how, for many, the experience of sexual abuse eventually led to depression and in some cases, to suicidal thoughts and actions. One explained that his mental health continued to deteriorate at a young age, and he attempted suicide at the age of 17 years old:

> *'I cut my wrist, and the scar is still there.' (Participant)*

Another participant described attempting suicide a number of years ago. This participant explained that:

> He was diagnosed with severe depression at age 17 and he still suffers with depression to this time. *(Participant)*

Another participant explained that he became suicidal when he was of primary school age and this was so severe that he:

> … tried to get hit by a bus by running out in front of it beside the school. The bus stopped quickly so missed him. He felt trapped because he could not run away from incidents of abuse or tell his mother. He couldn't see another way out. *(Participant)*

Several participants described similar experiences:

> The participant attempted suicide after an evening of drinking. (*Participant*)
>
> *'I often wondered why I was unable in my suicide attempts. I witnessed the abuse, and rape of two fellow students that in their teens committed suicide as a result of their pain.' (Participant)*

> The participant attempted suicide on multiple occasions and was never able to speak to anyone about what was going on for him inside. *(Participant)*
>
> As a young person, the participant attempted suicide numerous times. *(Participant)*

87. Several participants spoke of former classmates who had died by suicide or high-risk behaviour and expressed the belief that those early deaths were related to sexual abuse at school.

88. While the majority of participants reported suffering in silence and isolation, a number of participants spoke of trying to manage emotional pain. The most common coping strategy described was use of alcohol and drugs.

> *'I started drinking when I was 13.' (Participant)*
>
> It was around the age of 16 that he started to drink a lot and didn't do very well in school. (*Participant)*

89. For several participants this started at a young age. At 11 or 12 years old one participant discovered alcohol and used this as a means of coping as it brought relief from the fear and trauma. At 13 another participant began self-medicating with solvents, painkillers and drinking alcohol. One participant began smoking at the age of seven and drinking at the age of 13.

(iii) Physical Health Impacts

90. A number of participants reported experiencing health conditions that they described as direct consequences of physical and sexual abuse. In some cases, these included direct injuries such as internal injuries and deafness/tinnitus due to beatings.

91. In other cases, participants reported health problems related to their stomach and digestion, which they viewed as a physical response to being sexually abused, as these symptoms occurred at times they were at risk of abuse or directly after an episode of abuse. One participant suffered from ulcers and went through a period of refusing to go to school. Another participant found the only way to relieve his pain was to vomit. A third participant explained how, as a result of the abuse, they began having trouble going to the toilet as a child and starting withholding.

92. Of those participants who spoke of impacts on their mental and physical health, most reported that these issues continued into adulthood. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

F. Chapter Summary

93. This chapter has described participants' accounts of the impact of sexual abuse on them as children and young adolescents. Participants told the Scoping Inquiry about the effects on their sense of self, their experience of childhood, mental and physical health, relationships, their experience of school and their understanding of the world around them at key formative stages of development.

94. Participants explained how childhoods were shattered by the experience of sexual abuse and how the loss of innocence had deep and long-lasting effects. This was the case for those who experienced abuse as an isolated incident and for those who experienced repeated abuse.

95. A sense of shame, and difficulties with self-esteem and confidence were reported by many participants, leading to relationship and other difficulties. Participants explained that relationships with parents suffered for many reasons. In some cases, participants felt a sense of anger with parents that they had not been protected; in others, participants' behaviours such as disengagement, academic difficulties, social withdrawal or experimentation with alcohol or drugs were seen as acts of rebellion, creating challenging family dynamics.

96. Participants described how fear, dread and a constant watchfulness impacted on them as children. Many spoke of being unable to be fully present at school, and the hugely detrimental effect that this had on their ability to concentrate, to pay attention in school or to study effectively.

97. The effect of sexual abuse on childhood mental health was described by participants as devastating. Participants described how, as children, they experienced stress, anxiety, depression and PTSD, with some relating how they were prescribed medication or hospitalised because of these conditions at very young ages. Negative coping mechanisms including use of alcohol, drugs, disordered eating, and self-harm were described, and some participants explained that they experienced suicidal ideation. In some instances, as children or teenagers, participants attempted suicide. Some also spoke of schoolmates whom they believed to have died by suicide as teenagers or young adults, and whom participants believe were sexually abused.

98. The impact of sexual abuse on participants in childhood and adolescents was described as profoundly damaging. In some cases, the effects described in this chapter continued into adulthood for many years, and many participants told the Survivor Engagement team that impacts rooted in childhood were exacerbated in later years. The next chapter describes what participants told us about the effects of abuse on their lives as adults.

Chapter 6:
Participant Accounts of the Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse in Adulthood

Content Warning: This chapter contains details of participants' descriptions of sexual abuse, physical violence and reference to suicide. It may be distressing to read.

A. Introduction

1. Exposure to adverse events in childhood are strong predictors of problems in later life. A variety of physical and mental health-related consequences affecting children well into their adult years, including cognitive delays, impaired development, poor academic achievement, mental illness, substance abuse, disease and more have been linked to adverse experiences such as childhood sexual abuse.
2. This chapter outlines how participants described the impact of child sexual abuse on their adult life up to the present day. The majority of participants provided information on some or all of the topics within this chapter. In keeping with the Survivor Engagement process's trauma-informed approach, not all participants elected to talk in detail about the impact of sexual abuse on their adulthood. While facilitators may have gently prompted on some overall themes, participants were not asked specific questions about the impact on their adulthood. Therefore, this chapter does not represent a survey of every participant but the perspectives of those who chose to discuss these issues.
3. In interviews and written submissions, participants described how the ongoing impact of childhood sexual abuse has had a profoundly negative and cumulative effect on many aspects of their adult lives. Most told the Survivor Engagement team that sexual abuse seriously impaired one or more of the following: sense of self and self-esteem; mental and/or physical health; educational attainment; career and professional opportunities; relationships with family and friends. Many of these impacts represent a continuation of issues described in the previous chapter which reported on participants' descriptions of the impact of sexual abuse on their childhood.
4. The impacts described by some participants included severe and complex mental health problems, including severe anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), flashbacks of sexual assault, intrusive thoughts, suicidal ideation and attempts. For many, these impacts were described as causing almost unbearable emotional pain. Several participants reported experiencing multiple breakdowns. Mental health challenges had an impact on some survivors' ability to form lasting connections with others, as well as significantly reducing their wellbeing and happiness across their life.
5. Physical ill-health related to sexual abuse was also reported including physical health conditions, autoimmune disorders and ulcers which were attributed to stress resulting from sexual abuse. Some reported ongoing chronic health conditions that were described as a direct result of physical damage due to sexual abuse as a child.

6. Many participants spoke about problematic use of drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms, and for some these issues were only addressed following a crisis point that often arrived later in life. When accessing rehabilitation supports, some participants said the therapeutic process brought them to acknowledge their sexual abuse as a part of the healing process. Some discussed how, while extremely painful, this began a slow and difficult pathway away from some of the worst impacts of the abuse.
7. Participants also described their experiences of engaging with religious orders later in life, seeking an apology or facts relating to their sexual abuse. Some participants spoke of their experiences with the legal system, whether in criminal proceedings or civil actions, and the difficulties that many experienced in this regard. Participants also spoke of the support provided by spouses and partners, and counselling and therapeutic relationships. Sadly, not all were able to report that partners or families were understanding and compassionate, and some said that they did not find counselling helpful.
8. Participants spoke of the strength they found in knowing that they were not alone, and many referenced the importance of hearing the broadcast of the RTÉ Documentary on One: Blackrock Boys (7 November 2022), which told the story of Mark and David Ryan and the sexual abuse they experienced. For many participants, this was the moment where they found the strength to speak about their own experiences.
9. The many and complex issues described by participants regarding the impact of childhood sexual abuse on their adult lives are set out under the following broad headings. As the reader will appreciate, there is connectivity and overlap between the sections.
    - Impact on health: mental and physical
    - Relationships
    - Employment and career
    - Loss of community, emigration and loss of faith
    - Engagement with religious orders as adults
    - Issues for the legal system and the state
    - What helped over the years

B. Impact on Health: Mental and Physical

(i) Sense of Self in Adulthood

10. A feeling of being a spectator rather than a participant in life was often discussed in the course of the participants' interviews. Many said that their sense of self, and self-esteem had been irreparably harmed. A few participants said they had suppressed the memories of the abuse until recently or had not connected the abuse with how they felt in adulthood. Throughout their earlier life they described experiencing emotions and reactions, such as ongoing sadness, that they could not understand, and felt that they were somehow 'bad' or 'wrong'.

11. Participants described the experience of sexual abuse, and its consequences, as fundamentally life changing. Participants spoke about how they kept searching for answers to 'why' questions, for which they could not find explanations:

> *'It throws up so many questions. Why me? What have I done? Why didn't I do anything? Why was I not able to? So many whys; that creates a problem.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I'd like to understand a bit more. Of what happened, how it happened, and why it happened? The "who" doesn't matter, they are dead.' (Participant)*

12. Some participants explained that they felt that the sexual abuse had destroyed their life entirely.

> *'I've never been okay. I can honestly say there's not one single day I have been okay.' (Participant)*

13. Many participants said they continue to feel sadness and/or anger thinking of how their life could have been, describing how sexual abuse altered their formation of self-identity at a young age. Many described a sense of loss related to their identity and their opportunities and place in the world. Some explained that this meant they did not know themselves, and often did not like themselves:

> The hardest part of all is that you lose that person you were meant to be, as you never meet that person again and fulfil your potential. *(Participant)*
>
> *'Am I the person that should have evolved, or am I a product of this abuse? I don't know who I am.' (Participant)*
>
> *'What would my life be like now if that hadn't happened? I am exceptionally angry. I was at my greatest need to be protected when I was most vulnerable.' (Participant)*
>
> *'My feeling now is sadness. What would my life have been if these things didn't happen to me as a child or a young adult?' (Participant)*

14. Participants explained how they kept trying to move on from the sexual abuse and enjoy life despite the past. However, they said they found this very difficult:

> *'I got a life sentence; we all got a life sentence.' (Participant)*

15. This participant went on to say:

> *'It happened in the 60's, but really, it's happened every day since. You live with it every day. I try to move on, but it hits me in the face.' (Participant)*

Other participants described similar impacts:

> *'All through my life it's been hell. It's a fight every day in my head to keep the abuse to the back and to be in the here and now. It doesn't always happen. There are times where you dwell on what happened. I do get sad. I do get angry. I'd love to say I'm happy and free but I'm not. It's with me. It's inside me.' (Participant)*
>
> A permanent scar from the fear and terror is always there. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I can say that on the outside I appear a functioning adult, but my inner self is still that boy living that hell.' (Participant)*
>
> *'You're emotionally trapped. You're still the little boy putting his arms up asking for help, as well as the adult saying, "cop on." It's trying to find the happy balance between the child who could have been so different, and the man looking at him.' (Participant)*

16. Participants reported that poor self-esteem and self-confidence followed them from childhood. As adults they said they continued to have frequent feelings of worthlessness, self-disgust and self-hatred.

> *'[The abuse] messed up my life, it ruined me. It ruined me as a person, it ruined my childhood. It impacted my personal life, my friendships, and my work life.' (Participant)*
>
> *'What it's done to my life, it's ruined, and I'm trying to rebuild 40 years of my life.' (Participant)*

17. Participants described how childhood shame continued to influence their perception of self and how they related to others, which was further linked to difficulties in building, growing and maintaining relationships. One participant described himself as still living in fear, even with participating in the Scoping Inquiry, and that being identifiable was a real concern for him. Others discussed keeping a barrier between themselves and other people as a way of avoiding having to ever share the 'secret' of their abuse.

'I think the longest lasting effect is that I still live in fear of people finding out what has happened to me in the past.' (Participant)

'I don't want to be meeting people who know my background.' (Participant)

'I never wanted anyone to know. I couldn't be myself.' (Participant)

18. Participants described how the shame they carried with them from childhood continued to build a wall of fear and isolation between them and other people.

'I am close to no living soul, even those close to me. I can't let myself be loved. I have no friends even from childhood, as being close means opening yourself up. I feel ashamed, dirty and unclean. I'm living a lie; I act all day, every day.' (Participant)

(ii) Mental Health

19. The majority of participants described significant negative impacts of sexual abuse on their mental health. Participants outlined a high prevalence of mental health conditions including anxiety, depression and PTSD as well as a range of adverse emotions and behaviours such as poor self-esteem/confidence, isolation, social withdrawal, shame, anger and hypervigilance. The various impacts were often described as interlinked and influencing all aspects of participants' lives, including their personal wellbeing, relationships, education and work life.

20. Many participants described suffering from mental health difficulties in silence for years. Some described how this resulted in a mental or physical breakdown. Many disclosed having spent time in in-patient mental health treatment and for some this experience involved a period in which suicide was contemplated or attempted.

21. Participants described how the impacts of sexual abuse were not experienced in isolation, but rather as interconnected in a vicious circle of suffering. For instance, participants described how mental illness led to harmful coping mechanisms, negative emotions and destructive behaviour, which then impacted relationships, leading to further mental health suffering and isolation. This complexity came through in different ways, with one participant describing profound effects of the abuse impacting all elements of his life from academic career to relationships, sense of self, addiction, mental wellbeing and isolation:

'The effects of the abuse were lifelong, including frequent flashbacks, nightmares, loss of sleep, ongoing embarrassment, shame, questioning "what if", and psychological and emotional hurt and damage.' (Participant)

'Everything just changed in my life after the abuse.' (Participant)

22. Participants described mental health conditions including anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder ('OCD'), depression, PTSD, hypervigilance, phobias and suicidality.

> *'I was so bad with anxiety and depression that I could not swallow, and then panic attacks started. It got worse. For two years I couldn't go to the cinema or anything, because I would get panic attacks.' (Participant)*
>
> Bhí an t-agallaí an-inmníoch, dhúisíodh sé i lár na hoíche ag mothú go raibh sé faoi ghlas i spás an-bheag cosúil le cónra. Chaith an t-agallaí bliain mar sin, bhí sé an-tinn agus bhí air éirí as an obair. *(Rannpháirtí)*
>
> The participant was very anxious, he would wake up in the middle of the night feeling as though he was locked inside a tiny space like a coffin. The participant spent a year like that, he was very unwell, and he had to give up work. *(Participant)*
>
> *'This [not being able to go to public toilets] remained with me all my adult life and I had to hide in some way when going to pee in the toilet. In public loos or restaurants or whatever. This, in turn, led to a lot of psychological and mental health problems. So much so it has curtailed me in going to, say, concerts or especially on holidays.' (Participant)*

23. One participant said that protracted mental health issues over years has left a deep impact:

> *'I developed chronic, severe anxiety.' (Participant)*

This participant described having difficulty with enclosed spaces which means that he has not been on an aeroplane in over a decade. He described panic attacks and difficulties with situations where he cannot easily exit a building.

24. Another participant noted ongoing impacts he links to his experience of abuse, including a need for order and cleanliness in his home.

25. This participant went on to say:

> *'I think the cleanliness came from him [the abuser] an awful lot because I felt so dirty from him.' (Participant)*

26. Many participants reported having had depression and/or significant ongoing sadness, which hampered their ability to live a rewarding life. A number of participants spoke about the challenge of getting through the day:

> *'I can't wait till I die, I'm not suicidal, but I can't wait till this is over.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I go to bed some nights and hope to fuck that I do not wake up.' (Participant)*

This participant went on to describe how:

'… *I pray to God that he will take me in the night.' (Participant)*

Other participants explained their difficulties:

'I have suffered with depression all of my life, unbelievable anger in my head. 44 years later, it's still going on.' (Participant)

'The only time I feel safe and happy is when I am in bed.' (Participant)

27. Many participants reported suffering from PTSD and having thoughts and flashbacks to their experience of sexual abuse. These experiences frequently involved intense intrusive memories that appeared during normal daily activities, and one participant described a:

'… freight train of memories.' (Participant)

28. Participants spoke of these thoughts as being difficult to control, and of having a very imposing and negative impact on them.

29. One participant said he felt sick discussing the sexual abuse. He reports never forgetting the smell of the abuser's breath and the mucus on his lips.

'It feels like it was only yesterday. This always comes back to haunt me.' (Participant)

30. A participant described flashbacks, night terrors and a feeling of experiencing rape over and over again as if it is being relived.

This is when she sometimes collapses and shakes and she has no control over these occurrences. *(Participant)*

31. Intrusive thoughts were experienced by another who believed that the abusers were following him around.

'I'd say "He's there, he's there, he's looking at me" but he wasn't, it was just my brain.' (Participant)

32. For some, these intrusive thoughts are tied to particular triggers such as people, places or things. A participant described how he experiences PTSD symptoms around churches to this day:

'I start to vomit when I smell incense or the smell of a church. Even just going for a funeral or a wedding, I'm on edge and just want to get out of there.' (Participant)

33. For others the thoughts occur when they are not busy and occupied, leading some participants to stave off intrusive thoughts by remaining constantly busy, a strategy that led to increased life stress.

'It affects me in different ways. It pops up in my head on a very regular basis in terms of what happened. I am reliving it constantly. The thoughts come to me at strange times. I keep myself very busy'. (Participant)

(iii) Mental Illness, Breakdowns and Suicidal Ideation/Suicide Attempts

34. A number of participants described how intense depression led to a psychological breakdown. In some cases, this caused suicidal ideation or attempts, resulting in the need for in-patient mental health treatment.

'I wasn't physically able to carry the torment.' (Participant)

35. One participant said that he suffered a breakdown that lasted over two years. Another said that in later life he had a breakdown.

36. A number of participants recounted some positive impacts from in-patient psychiatric treatment, or in some cases in-patient addiction treatment, as it allowed them space to speak about their sexual abuse for the first time and begin a journey towards healing. However, this path was generally reported as slow and difficult. One participant recounted his emotional response when he recognised a former pupil from his school in a newspaper article about abuse and broke down crying:

'I couldn't carry it anymore […] I felt like something was going to break'. (Participant)

He went on to say:

'I felt a relief reading it.' (Participant)

37. Others spoke of a breakdown as a prompt for getting help:

'In one way, [the breakdown] was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was like I started from scratch all over again, it felt like I got a second chance.' (Participant)

38. For some, the experience of having a breakdown was described as a repeated one that they and their family suffered through. One participant described multiple admissions to a psychiatric hospital over a period of many years.

'If you were to add up the amount of time I was in and out of there, trying to deal with those issues, it would add up to about two years.' (Participant)

39. One participant described how, for many years, he held onto the abuse as a 'pile'.

Whenever anything bad happened in his life, the participant would put it into the pile alongside the abuse. Whenever this pile got too big, it would cross from his unconscious to the conscious and the participant would have a breakdown. *(Participant)*

40. Many participants reported having had suicidal ideation or having previously attempted suicide. One said he carried his low self-confidence and feeling like there was something wrong with him for many years and that he had attempted suicide some years ago. Another said he had tried to overdose on medication.

> *'I was suicidal a couple of times, very serious. I just couldn't see a way out.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I had attempts to commit suicide when I came out with all this. I had a rope in the back of my car.' (Participant)*

41. These feelings were described as being frequently associated with adverse behaviour such as self-neglect, insecurity, and having difficulties establishing interpersonal boundaries.

(iv) Substance Abuse as a Coping Mechanism

42. Many participants described the problematic use of alcohol and/or drugs as a coping mechanism, in many cases starting in childhood. Several participants described trying to manage trauma with the use of substances, with drugs or alcohol as the most accessible, and in the case of alcohol, the most socially acceptable way to do this. Many explained that they only stopped when their life had reached crisis point and/or they began discussing the sexual abuse and beginning a healing process with professional assistance.

43. Those participants who reported using alcohol and/or drugs to cope spoke about how this eventually brought a range of significant challenges of its own, although it may have initially provided relief or escape. One participant said:

> *'Every morning I got up for 20 years, the abuse was in my head. That was haunting me every day and I became an alcoholic over that […] I was drinking to put on a front, to numb it.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Cannabis was the one thing that allowed me to feel something, to calm myself.' (Participant)*

Other participants spoke of addiction. One described how he started to use heroin in his 20s, with multiple suicide attempts. He is now clean and on methodone:

> *'I will never stop taking methadone as it helps me not torture myself over what happened.' (Participant)*
>
> *'In later life I drank alcoholically for half of my adult life. I was diagnosed as a chronic alcoholic. The alcohol was a kind of anaesthetic to numb the underlying psychological issues and pain and trauma.' (Participant)*

(v) Physical Health Issues

44. A minority of participants also described an adverse impact of the abuse on their physical health. In particular, some said that there was a connection between their elevated stress levels as a result of sexual abuse, and that they had developed autoimmune conditions and ulcers as a result of this.

45. A number of participants described how they and/or their doctors suspected a link between elevated cortisol levels and a range of health conditions. Participants described ongoing stomach problems and an auto-immune disease due to constant high anxiety.

> *'There is widespread inflammation from overactive immune system cells in my body. The doctor attributes this to the abuse from 50 years ago.' (Participant)*
>
> *'My heart, sexual and skeletal systems are seriously impaired by my constant watchfulness, producing severe anxiety, which was triggered by a real and immediate danger. I am suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, a hypervigilant overactive stress response. This pervasive stress response as I grew had a long-term effect, and I was forever changed.' (Participant)*

46. In some cases, ongoing chronic health conditions were described as a result of physical damage due to sexual abuse as a child. One participant described how medical investigation confirmed that the participant had a medical condition which was a result of extensive damage to the rectum.

C. Relationships

(i) General Relationships

47. For many participants, the impact of a lack of trust in others was described as disconnection, loneliness and isolation:

> *'There are days where I don't even talk to people […] I would like a little more communication, but I've almost convinced myself that if this is the price to pay for managing my life, then that's what it has to be […] I can't trust people now […] I'd like to say it gets better, but it gets worse.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I often said I would make the perfect soldier for war because I had no fear, no empathy. It's an awful way to be. I could go out and pretend to be social, but I wasn't. I have lost my emotions, even for my family. I did all the things as a father and as a husband, but there was one part of me that wasn't there with them.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I didn't know how to have happiness.' (Participant)*

48. Many described how trusting others and forming personal relationships is difficult and often unsuccessful; disclosure of personal experiences and feelings is rare and usually results in negative emotion. Another participant described himself as being self-protective and cautious around other people.

> *'In work, my mantra today is "trust no one." I lost all trust in humanity.' (Participant)*

49. One participant described the sexual abuse as having a major impact on his life and that he is still dealing with it. He avoids many social events and feels that he is:

> *'Totally an island on my own.' (Participant)*

(ii) Relationships with Spouses and Partners

50. Many participants described difficulties in their intimate relationships with previous and current partners, stemming from mistrust, fear of commitment, fear of losing the person, an inability to discuss what happened and continued shame or secrecy around the abuse.

51. The most common issues described by participants with regard to intimate relationships included a lack of trust and ability to commit, fear of taking the risks that are inherent in any intimate relationship, and not being able to be fully present in the relationship.

A participant described the difficulties he experiences in his relationship with his current partner.

> *'I'm thinking, "What happens if she dies?". It's an inability to fully engage and take a risk with feelings. I'm protecting myself. I'm going to suffer loss if I love someone fully. I set myself up in my childhood to ensure that never happened again, which, of course, is impossible.' (Participant)*

> *'I always felt rejected. Even on the day I got engaged I thought, "How do I get out of this?"' (Participant)*

52. Another participant described how, whenever he started a relationship, he would self-sabotage as soon as his partner would want more from him. One participant described a struggle with giving and receiving affection due to the abuse:

> *'It was driven out of me.' (Participant)*

53. Another participant described how a lack of confidence from a young age made it difficult for him to maintain relationships.

> *'I have missed out on marriage and on having a family.' (Participant)*

54. Some participants spoke about how they had deliberately kept aspects of their history of sexual abuse from their partner due to the continued sense of shame, creating emotional distance.

> *'My wife didn't know the full details of this and still doesn't know everything.' (Participant)*

55. Another man explained how he has been married to his wife for many years, but has only recently been able to share his history of abuse.

56. Some described their issues with trusting others as causing a sense of isolation or detachment, as if they were merely spectators and not participants in life. One described how, prior to engaging with therapy:

> *'I was very stressed. I'm very impulsive alright. I never went back on the drink again. I would never get close to anybody, … I would regard them as acquaintances rather than friends.' (Participant)*

57. Even when people did communicate about their past, this did not always result in positive outcomes in the relationship. Some participants described how, after disclosing the sexual abuse to their partner, they had not received the support they needed. One participant described how his mental health difficulties had been a challenge and his marriage had ended. During the marriage he experienced daily anxiety, panic attacks and a general feeling of not being part of the world. Another explained that their partner does not fully understand what happened.

58. Many participants described having difficulties in sexual and intimate relationships. Some participants explained that the concept of sex was disrupted from an early age which continued into their relationships, both in terms of how participants felt about sex and how they assumed that others felt about it. Some participants assumed that it was only natural to feel disgusted by sex, and so saw avoiding this with their partner as a respectful approach. One participant described how he was unable to consummate his marriage for a number of years as:

> He didn't think girls would want to be touched. He presumed that no one wanted people touching them. *(Participant)*

59. Others explained that, for them, the best way to avoid sex was to avoid all kinds of romantic relationships. For one participant:

> Relationships were nearly non-existent, and he didn't know how to have them. Sex felt like a dirty thing. *(Participant)*

60. Another participant had a fear of having full sex and described the difficulties he experienced with lasting relationships. He described how it has been many years since he has been in a relationship:

> 12-18 months was when things would get serious, and he would end their relationship. *(Participant)*

61. Some participants who were married or in long term relationship said that where other aspects of the relationship functioned well, they were not able to experience sex as a genuinely positive experience. In some cases, this had contributed to the end of the relationship. A participant highlighted feeling happy in his life now but felt that a normal sexual life was definitely missing:

> *'Sex is an important part of a relationship but that never quite worked for me.' (Participant)*

62. He further explained,

> *'It was summed up well in one of the interviews on RTE: "Your first sexual experience is with a 50-year-old priest". It's hard to put that back together again.' (Participant)*

63. One participant stated that he had struggled with relationships and sex, self-sabotaging when partners wanted more from him. He said that he had hurt people and that a significant long-term relationship had broken down, describing how he is now estranged from that part of his family.

64. Another described the impact on his marriage as significant and explained that he has a lot of empathy for his ex-wife because she had lived with him for many years when he was struggling with what had happened. He said:

> '… *it must have been horrific'*. He described marital infidelity as a part of life and said that he did not know if he was gay, straight or bisexual. *(Participant)*

65. For the participants who were LGBTQIA+, the abuse for some was described as having the effect of postponing their ability to come out. They explained that the challenge lay initially with being honest with themselves about their sexuality, and secondly being able to overcome feelings of shame so as to be able to speak to others about it. Some participants also discussed feelings of confusion between their natural attraction to people of the same gender, and the feelings of disgust associated with sexual abuse by someone of the same gender.

(iii) Relationship with Children

66. A few participants explained they had made a conscious decision not to have children because of their fear that they would not be able to protect them. One participant decided he never wanted any children, because he didn't want what happened to him to happen to anyone else.

> *'I was never going to have children, because of this. I realised at a very early age that I could never, ever live thinking this could happen to a child of mine. I would be terrified every day of the week.' (Participant)*

67. Another said:

> *'One of the reasons I didn't have kids is because I didn't like being one.' (Participant)*

68. The decision not to have children or a family was often accompanied by a deep sense of sadness.

69. Some participants spoke of how their experiences had influenced their care of their own children and grandchildren.

> She highlighted how her experience has made her very protective of her children and her grandchildren. She has a very close family now. She is careful about keeping them safe and not letting them go places on their own. *(Participant)*

70. Many said that they were fearful of what could happen to their children when they were young. This led to constant worry and what they later understood to be overprotective parenting.

71. One wondered if he would know if his child was being abused as he hid his abuse from his parents. Another described himself as extremely risk averse, and, at times, preoccupied with his children's safety.

> *'Our kids never had a babysitter because of what happened to me, because I go into this protective mode.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I've been hugely protective, kind of a helicopter parent.' (Participant)*

72. On a day-to-day basis this heighted level of anxiety was described by participants as restricting what their children were able to do and limiting their experiences.

73. Participants discussed how they viewed their personal struggles as having a negative impact on family dynamics and their children's wellbeing.

> *'The dysregulation and anger with my kids, it had a profound impact on my family and my wife.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I'm also stating that all of this crime has affected every aspect of my children's lives. Due to my post-traumatic stress responses (i.e., my constant anxiety regarding everything that might be a danger to them), my children were robbed of a happy mother.' (Participant)*

74. Another participant described a decline in his mental health and explained how his child now lives with their other parent full-time. This participant described several suicide attempts. Participants detailed how their adult children were impacted by the revelations of abuse, describing profound impacts on family life.

> The past few years have traumatised the participant's children too. Regarding the relationship to their family now, the participant said: *'It's like being drowned on the beach from the wave while your family is on the beach watching, they come in to try to save you and they start drowning too. There's no lifeguard.' (Participant)*

75. Another participant described estrangement from their adult child.

76. A very small number of participants spoke about the fear of becoming abusers themselves, both in relation to their own children as well as to children in general. This resulted in their maintaining an emotional distance from their own children and/or avoiding interactions with other children.

77. A participant described how this fear impacts his life:

> [The participant] has done work with charities and has always felt uncomfortable and vulnerable around kids. *(Participant)*

78. Another recalled how he felt uncomfortable giving his children a bath or giving them hugs.

> *'I couldn't have close contact with my own kids. I can't hug them. Never.' (Participant)*

(iv) Relationships with Parents and Extended Family

79. A number of participants said they never told their parents about the abuse as they could not bear to see their parents' pain and potential feelings of guilt. Others never got to tell their parents, as the parents had passed away by the time the participants found the strength to speak up about it.

> *'After that [the abuse] I was disconnected from my family, and I still am today.' (Participant)*

80. One participant never spoke to his mother about it, and she is dead now. Another participant apologised to his mother for his behaviour when growing up but didn't tell her why he acted that way because he was ashamed.

81. A number of participants who had disclosed the abuse described how their parents reacted with feelings of guilt, regret, sadness and heartbreak for not having known about, or having stopped the abuse. This added to the emotional burden for participants. One participant's mother unexpectedly brings up the participant's experience of abuse; this being on the mind of his mother at this stage in her life is very distressing for the participant, who explained that:

> *'… it troubles her still to this date. It's because of this that I finally decided to participate in this Scoping Inquiry.' (Participant)*

82. A participant described dealing with guilt alongside his mother as she experienced intense feelings of guilt for not having been aware of the abuse during his childhood:

> *'I'm running out of time with my mother, and she feels guilty, and I am telling her it is not her fault, yet I have difficulty believing it wasn't my fault.' (Participant)*

83. Some participants found that their parents did not want to hear about the abuse and in some cases, participants said their parents could not believe the abuse had actually happened. Another participant told his family but found:

> *'They've never really been able to take on board what's happened, they've never been able to have a conversation.' (Participant)*

84. One participant recalled how he told his parents about the abuse some years later:

> The participant says he lost his childhood and relationships with his parents. His disruptive behaviour was never understood. In later years he told his parents about the abuse, but they did not want to hear him. They called him names and told him to leave the house. *(Participant)*

85. Some participants explained that they felt their parents struggled with the disclosure of abuse due to their own shame, something that many of the participants had experienced throughout their own lives. One participant described telling his parents as an adult and how he utterly regretted it as they did not believe him. He described how:

> *'They came back a week later and said they were prepared to believe me now. I didn't expect to not be believed. There was an element of shame in it.' (Participant)*

86. In a small number of cases participants said that their parents discouraged them even as adults from speaking about the abuse or taking a case against their abuser for fear it would bring shame to the family.

> *'Don't drag the family name down.' (Participant)*

87. Participants also emphasised the importance of relationships with family as being important to their healing. One told how a family member seemed to recognise that the participant needed help:

> *'She started me seeing therapists. If that hadn't happened, something would have happened to me in any of those pillars of life which would have stopped me having a fantastic life, good career, and good marriage, which I have managed to have.' (Participant)*

88. Familial relationships were strengthened in some instances and some participants spoke of the support they received from parents and others. One participant credited his mother with his ability to manage the challenges of the abuse:

> He feels that she passed something to him which gives him his own faith and ability to go on. He has found his own God, his own faith, that is loving. *(Participant)*

89. A few participants said they blamed their parents for the abuse taking place, as they found it hard to believe that their parents were not aware of it. A participant explained that:

> He keeps his family at a distance and shut people out because they were not there for him and there is no reason for him to trust them anymore. *(Participant)*

90. Another participant's adult relationship with her own parents was also negatively impacted.

> *'I felt hugely angry at my mother. I didn't understand why she couldn't have done more [at the time of the assault].' (Participant)*
>
> *'I question why my father especially did not protect me, why he did not know what was going on?' (Participant)*

D. Employment and Career

(i) Difficulties with People in Authority

91. A small number of participants described how they found it very challenging to cope with authority figures, particularly in their workplace. The most common reason was that these roles reminded them, consciously or unconsciously, of the power relations between themselves as children, and the people in authority who abused them. The result was that they sometimes reacted inappropriately in the workplace. For some, they said this meant reacting with avoidance due to feeling fear, scepticism, or distrust. Others stated that they rebelled against authority figures or showed reluctance to engage with or follow direction. In all cases, these reactions were described as having consequences for career progression, and in some cases on people's ability to maintain employment.

92. One participant described how he developed issues with figures in authority as he would view them in a similar light the person who abused him:

> *'I put his face onto every authority figure in my life.' (Participant)*

93. Another explained that a negative impact was that he developed a scepticism around authority, which meant that he was unable to cope with some employers.

> Having experienced the abuse made the participant sceptical of authority. The participant says that he was probably not an easy employee to have but was nevertheless incredibly faithful and loyal. *(Participant)*

94. One participant described having a complete and total distrust of authority, and it has taken him until he was much older to come to terms with it. Another said that he only managed to have a successful career because he was self-employed and did not have to deal with an employer.

95. Additionally, a few participants described how they found it difficult to remain in a job for any significant period of time. Reasons given for this included addiction to alcohol and drugs, lack of persistence in work, poor self-esteem/self-confidence, difficulties collaborating with others, "self-sabotage" and challenges dealing with conflicts and obstacles.

96. A participant said that he went on to secure high paying jobs but would always leave as an act of self-sabotage. In one notable instance, he had found a good job abroad which he did for over a year but left because:

> *'I didn't feel good enough, I didn't feel I deserved it.' (Participant)*

97. A few participants described how they became workaholics/perfectionists as adults to help them keep the memories of the abuse at bay, and attained career success as a result. However, some said this came at a cost of personal wellbeing and functioning of family life. One participant explained how:

> He felt driven by a fear of failure which motivated him into significant career and material success *(Participant)*.

98. However, he described facing significant personal challenges despite his outward success. Other participants spoke of a feeling of emptiness despite outward success and of how an all-consuming focus on work in order to avoid other aspects of life was unhealthy.

E. Loss of Community, Emigration and Loss of Faith

99. Participants described feeling they had to move away from their localities and hometowns or to emigrate to get away from the place where sexual abuse occurred. Some described intrusive memories associated with the sexual abuse that meant they could not comfortably spend time in their childhood community. This led to a severing of social ties with home and friends from school as that might remind them of the sexual abuse.

100. One participant said he realised whilst in school, that university was a way to escape where he was living, saying that:

> *'The only reason I went there [university] was because it was as far away as I could get from there [hometown].' (Participant)*

101. A participant described how the day he finished his Leaving Certificate exams he moved:

> *'Run as far away as possible … run, run just to get away.' (Participant)*

102. Others described the discomfort of visiting their childhood home:

> *'When I got married it helped. I moved out of that area. I don't even like going down to visit my brother who still lives in that area.' (Participant)*

> *'Every time I return home, having emigrated from my hometown, I arrive at the bus station situated adjacent to the school, the place where the abuse took place. So, it's a constant reminder each time I return which can never be erased.' (Participant)*

(i) Emigration

103. A minority of participants said that they had left Ireland specifically to get away from memories of sexual abuse. They described how the association between Ireland and the abuse meant that they lost their chance to live in the country they had grown up in. One participant describes only calming down once he had left Ireland. Another described how he eventually left Ireland.

> *'I couldn't go back to Ireland, because what was I going to do? I couldn't go back.' (Participant)*

104. Several participants explained how emigrating had helped as they could continue their education and work in an environment free of reminders of sexual abuse.

105. Some described feeling that they were forced to leave Ireland, and they identified their emigration as another lasting and distressing consequence of the sexual abuse. One participant said:

> *'They took my family away from me, they took my country away from me, they took everything I had away from me.' (Participant)*

(ii) Loss of Faith

106. Many participants described how their experience of sexual abuse had led them to reject the Catholic faith. For some this loss was painful for many reasons, including its impact on their ability to participate in family rituals such as weddings and funerals. Some participants described this loss as a form of spiritual abuse.

> *'What happened destroyed my trust in the Catholic church.' (Participant)*

107. Some participants described how attending church-centred events such as weddings, first holy communions and funerals became difficult. Participants described being conflicted in not wanting to attend these events on the one hand and wanting to be part of family and community celebrations on the other. Some spoke of difficulties in attending their parents' funerals due to the presence of members of the clergy.

> *'I rejected religion and freed myself from its teachings. I am proud of this achievement. But it was very difficult to free myself from Church tyranny in Ireland. When my mother died, I was [age]. I never saw her in her coffin. I didn't go into the funeral home because I couldn't bear to hear priests prattling their nonsense over her. Her dead body was theirs, not mine.' (Participant)*

F. Experience of Engagement with Religious Orders as Adults

(i) Challenging Experiences

108. Many participants said they had approached the religious order in charge of the school they had attended to make a formal statement or complaint about their abuse. Most of the participants who spoke about their engagement with religious orders said these interactions had been disappointing, frustrating and in some cases retraumatising.

109. Some participants said that the most challenging aspect of the meetings was the behaviour of the religious orders' representatives and in some cases, these were described as showing little empathy or compassion for survivors. Some participants described leaving these meetings with the feeling that the orders 'just wanted them to go away'. One participant described his impression that the order would prefer that the sexual abuse remained away from public attention, and he felt like it was being covered up.

> *'It felt like [their message was] go away and get therapy and leave us alone.' (Participant)*

110. In other instances, participants felt that attempts at opening a dialogue were dismissed, leaving participants feeling ignored and disrespected. One participant carries anger about the treatment he received when he complained about the sexual abuse:

> *'I was treated like a piece of shit on their shoes.' (Participant)*

Other participants described their experiences:

> *'These people don't care; they don't show respect. It's all about money.' (Participant)*
>
> *'They asked me if I feel shame and I said not at all. They are the people that should feel shame.' (Participant)*

111. Participants reported that they felt they had been met with denial and obfuscation, and that representatives had attempted to confuse and belittle them. Some participants reported that the message they received was that they should drop the matter and not bother the order about the abuse.

112. Other participants recounted how they felt dismissed and disregarded by the orders.

> *'It took until 2009 to report it to [the religious order] but by that stage Brother X had died and all I received from the order was a one-page letter telling me that they would pray for me and giving me the contact details for [Garda Detective].' (Participant)*

113. Some participants experienced these episodes as retraumatising.

114. A small number of participants described feeling that actions taken by the religious order were intended to intimidate and dissuade them from taking their complaints further, by means of warnings over costs or references to family status. One participant described what happened when he engaged with the order in his early adulthood:

> *'[The religious order representative] said I should consider whether I'd be able to get employment at a good company, and if going public could impact my exam results from the stress of it. He said it would impact my father's standing in the community if it became public knowledge.' (Participant)*

115. This participant went on to explain:

> *'So, they won. I had planned to go to the Guards after I spoke to the priest. And I didn't. I was coerced into silence. That is front and centre to me.' (Participant)*

116. Another participant contacted, and met with the order:

> The [representative of the religious order] tried to convince the participant not to pursue criminal action and offered access to the benevolent fund which the participant declined. *(Participant)*

117. A participant recalled:

> *'Then when the whole thing came out, the cheek of the head of [the religious order]to come down to my mother's house and ask them not to sue them.' (Participant)*

118. Participants described religious orders telling them that they would be liable for the religious orders' legal costs in the event they should lose their case, which participants felt was an attempt to dissuade them from pursing a case:

> *'I was part of the process going through the Courts [but] that got stopped when [the religious order] said we were going to have to pay all their legal fees. That was a tactic used by [name of] solicitors to discourage us from going ahead.' (Participant)*

119. Another participant spoke of being advised by his legal team that:

> … the prospects of winning were low as these cases are so hard to prove and that if they lost the case the [religious order] would come looking for their costs from his estate when he died. This was not acceptable to him and a risk he could not afford to take as he had made his will to leave all of his estate to charity. *(Participant)*

120. Similarly, a participant explained that he:

> … had gone to see a solicitor a number of years ago, who said that the only recourse would be the High Court and that it would be defended by the order with all their might. It was too big a risk to take because the other side would have far greater resources. *(Participant)*

121. Some participants gave accounts of being told by representatives of a religious order that they had no record of the person named as the abuser ever having worked for them, or that this person had not been at the school at the same time as the participant or that records had been destroyed. One participant recalled how he had:

> … phoned the [religious order] and was told that they had no record of a [member] with that name, and that they had no fund for compensation. He further recalled that the person on the phone mentioned that they heard the participant had been going to counselling. *'The [name of religious order] are known for not giving two fucks about victims' (Participant)*

122. In other instances, participants said that religious orders denied having received any previous complaints about their members, but they later heard from peers that many other survivors were told the same thing. A participant recounted how he had spoken to a religious order:

> They told him they had heard rumours about what went on but never had any proof that anything happened. They said he was the first person to sit down and tell the story about being abused, and they settled there and then. They sorted out counselling for him. He found out after that [other survivors] had also been and had been told to keep their mouths shut and settled also. More people came forward and said that they had the same experience. *(Participant)*

123. Participants said that some religious orders had denied that they had been contacted in the past to raise concerns about members of the order or other school staff accused of sexual abuse. Some reported that they had been told by the religious order that signed letters had been anonymous complaints, or that correspondence had been lost. A participant described being asked to use the personal email address of a representative of the order for correspondence. The participant interpreted this request to mean that there would be no official record of the participant's correspondence.

124. Another participant expressed deep frustration and anger about how a particular religious order have dealt with historical abuse and the obstacles for people trying to get justice.

> *'I would like the Government to take this on and tackle the barriers that the [religious order] are putting up.' (Participant)*
>
> They are not of the mindset to participate. *(Participant)*
>
> *'They put every obstacle in the way that they could.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It was rotten then, and it is still rotten now because they are trying to cover it up. They have done the uttermost to stop the truth coming out. It was wrong then and it's still wrong now and the fear-factor and the intimidation that they got away with; they are still trying to do it.' (Participant)*

125. One participant explained how he had written a letter to a religious order. He described his experience:

> When dealing with the [religious order representative], there was chaotic paperwork and reporting following the interviewee's complaint [which] didn't show appropriate respect to the incident. There was a delayed response. When the participant requested records from his time at [school], the [religious order representative] replied that all records had been destroyed under data protection laws. The participant later discovered this was a lie. *(Participant)*

126. A participant said that the response of the order had made it difficult to make progress in their healing and recovery.

> *'I am still bitter; I think there are two nails to it for me. First there is the shit that happened, and second, [the religious orders saying] "what do you do about the shit that happened?" Nowadays the stuff that happens is worse than the stuff that happened initially to me as a child.' (Participant)*

127. Some participants spoke of being angry about what they experienced as religious orders' lack of cooperation and inability to take responsibility for the actions of their members. Participants described experiences where religious orders implied they were merely seeking financial gain, and this was described as deeply hurtful and insulting. One participant described meeting a member of the relevant religious order, who told him that the order had cases taken to court and it had been found that the person who said they had been sexually abused was lying, warning him of the costs that the survivor would face in such an instance. The participant described how the religious order's representative was:

> *'Classifying me as part of a general cohort of people on the take.' (Participant)*

128. Many reported feeling that any financial compensation they received, whether through civil settlements or redress schemes, could not compensate for the harm they suffered.

> *'I go to bed at night, and I do not want to wake up in the morning. No money can make up for that.' (Participant)*

129. Others expressed the view that protecting the order and its reputation and assets took priority over protecting survivors. Expressing his disappointment in the lack of support and acknowledgement he received from the religious order, one participant said:

> *'The order acted like a company and protected their assets like a company.' (Participant)*

130. Many participants said they believed that schools and religious orders took measures to prevent reports of sexual abuse becoming public.

131. Some participants expressed the view that some schools have not cooperated with their efforts, as adults, to expose what happened or to obtain some measure of justice.

132. One participant sent a statement to his old school, as he was told that the school was interested in taking care of survivors of abuse. The participant stated that his old school was not interested and even tried to cover for the perpetrator.

(ii) Impact of Receiving a Formal Apology from Religious Orders

133. A small number of participants who had received an apology said they felt that this helped them on their path to healing. These participants felt the apology they had received was genuine and that it had been useful in their healing.

> *'That meant a lot to me. That is a piece of paper I cherish; it was an unconditional apology. It is very important to be believed. I was also lucky I was believed by my parents.' (Participant)*

134. Some participants who received an apology said they felt this was insufficient, with some saying they felt that the gesture was cynical or standardised:

> *'That was a load of bullshit [referring to an apology]. Even in 2023, they don't get the message. They're still covering it up.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It is not sincere when they apologise. They only do it because they are expected by society to apologise.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Everything had been sanitised by their attorneys and that took any sincerity out of it.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I came in with files and said I'm just looking for an opportunity to talk. None of them would apologise. They would say a very well-trained legal sentence. I found it very insulting.' (Participant)*

135. One participant described having requested that his apology be read in a particular room in the school, as it held symbolic importance as the place where he had been abused. The participant said that the behaviour of the order on this occasion failed to acknowledge the significance of this moment:

> *'There was no empathy, they were just blank. We were being treated like dirt.' (Participant)*

136. Several participants said they had asked for an apology and had not received one. This was felt to be:

> *'Extremely disrespectful to a human being.' (Participant)*

(iii) Peer Support

137. Several participants spoke of their feelings of isolation and vulnerability when engaging with religious orders. Some described being unaware as to whether any other survivors had come forward, and feeling as though they were the only one with these experiences. Others spoke of the experience of having found others who had been through the same things and having approached the relevant religious order collectively:

> *'When you're a child, all your power is taken away … so we instinctively wanted to be worked with as a group.' (Participant)*

138. Another participant said it feels unfair that the order knows of every complainant, but the survivors don't know of each other at all in many instances. He described this as:

> *'… a massive imbalance of power.' (Participant)*

(iv) Restorative Justice

139. A minority of participants spoke of having engaged in restorative justice processes with religious orders. For those that had, feedback was mixed, with some saying it had been beneficial. One participant would like to see engagement in more restorative justice for victims. His experience is that in telling his story:

> *'I got my power back.' (Participant)*

Other participants described their experiences:

> *'The restorative justice model certainly works, or at least for me it worked.' (Participant)*
>
> He has taken the route of restorative justice thus far; an outcome of which has been paid-for, specialist counselling support. (*Participant)*

140. Other participants noted that restorative justice processes need to be well-designed and administered carefully:

> Lastly, the participant feels that there is a place for restorative justice approaches, however these need to be carefully managed. *(Participant)*
>
> Any restorative justice processes need to be managed very carefully, the participant was involved in one, and the priests involved were extremely cynical. *(Participant)*

141. Some participants who said they were disappointed by the process explained they felt it was difficult to engage in true restorative justice as those responsible for the abuse were deceased or absent due to ill health.

> The participant believes many of these restorative justice efforts are a PR move. *(Participant)*

142. One participant has been going through a restorative justice process and is availing of counselling offered by the religious order. He described how, because the individual responsible is dead, he has questions which will never be answered.

143. Another participant said the process was of limited use as he was not able to access relevant records:

> The people running the process were very nice and the participant gained a little bit of closure, but the participant nevertheless felt disappointed by the process. The participant had gone in with a list of about 20 different questions beforehand and the [religious order] were unable to answer any of them, because it was reported that no records were kept. The participant doesn't feel like the [religious order's] restorative justice process is actually restorative. Additionally, the participant feels an apology is meaningless if they are unable to provide any records. The person who committed the abuse is dead and the school made no attempt to find out who had reported the abuse at the time to see if they were ok. The people apologising now were not involved at the time, so any apology is hollow and meaningless. *(Participant)*

144. Another participant said:

> *'I have met (representatives of the religious order) three times, over four hours and it's obvious that they don't get it and they don't care. They're never going to help and they won't help me.' (Participant)*

145. Others explained that the process did not deliver the required accountability, by way of redress, to address the extent of the pain caused. One participant noted that:

> While [the religious order] have been very open and accommodating, the redress does not come close to acknowledging the suffering involved. *(Participant)*

G. Issues for the Legal System and the State

(i) Participant Experiences of the Justice System

146. The majority who spoke about their experiences of civil and criminal cases in the legal system described the process as negative. Many told how the cases took years, and this was attributed in part to what participants described as delaying tactics of the relevant religious order's legal teams.

> *'… when the DPP decided to prosecute, I cried at home and said at least we are going to get the bastard now. Three other days have been fixed for the trial to start, and it hasn't. From the time it was reported to now, it's been eight years waiting for the trial to be held.' (Participant)*

147. A participant describes his civil action as a:

> *'Four-year process that nearly killed me because of the stress. I was doing it because I felt I had to do it. I achieved nothing.' (Participant)*

148. Many described the adversarial legal system in court as unsuitable for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. They described experiences where cross-examination lasted for days, and was experienced as aggressive and inappropriately confrontational, with experienced legal teams attempting to discredit their testimonies.

149. Participants spoke of being portrayed as liars and unreliable witnesses in court. One participant said their experience with the Gardaí was excellent, but the court experience was very different, and he described what he experienced on the stand as

> '*a character assassination*.' *(Participant)*

150. A participant shared his experience of watching his friend go through the court process:

> *'I watched a friend in court, what he went through; they destroyed him for three days. He never deserved what they put him through.' (Participant)*

151. Some participants maintained that the current system is completely inappropriate for survivors of sexual abuse.

> *'I understand innocent until proven guilty, but I, the victim, felt I was guilty. The whole judicial system was very unfriendly and hard to understand and actually more lenient to the accused than the victim.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I told [the defendant's barrister] "He raped me." She went red, she looked ashamed.' (Participant)*

152. Participants described the challenges posed by basic logistical arrangements in attending court. They reported having to sit across from persons accused of abuse in the corridor before court and having to use the same toilet facilities.

> He didn't realise that he would have to sit on a bench across from the abuser outside the courtroom until the day. One day his family couldn't accompany him, but a representative from One in Four did, that person was a great support, and he would have really found the process unbearably difficult if she had not been there. It's important to know people are on your side because it is very intimidating. *'It was really important to me that when I came down off the stand that I wasn't going to sit on my own.' (Participant)*

153. Several participants said that taking legal action had been difficult because solicitors were unwilling to take on cases against religious orders. Cost was also mentioned as a significant factor preventing survivors from securing legal representation where individuals could not afford to make large downpayments to secure legal services.

(ii) Experiences with An Garda Síochána and the Director of Public Prosecutions

154. A small number of participants described frustration with their experiences with the Gardaí. Some described a lack of action or long delays on reports that they made, and some described how their statements or complaints were lost.

> In the 1970s [the participant] told the police, however there was no action. *(Participant)*

155. One participant described how they reported the abuse to the Gardaí:

> An officer explained that they investigated the alleged abuse, but other priests had claimed that the abuse did not occur. Moreover, the Garda explained that since the abuser was dead, there was nothing that could be done by the Gardaí. *(Participant)*

156. Another participant said that he went to the Gardaí for the first time in recent years and told them what had happened to him. Although the priest named by the participant is still alive, the participant said that he is unaware of any investigation by the Gardaí or the Church. The participant is very disappointed and angry about this. The participant stated that he often enquires about the status of his case, but nothing has happened since he reported it.

> *'I have the feeling they will just wait for my abuser to die so they don't have to take care of it. The police are a bit of a joke. I still don't know if they have contacted the priest.' (Participant)*

157. Some participants had positive interactions with An Garda Síochána.

> He primarily dealt with two Guards throughout the process. The Guards were a credit throughout the process. *(Participant)*

(iii) Issues for the State

158. Participants spoke of the influence that the Catholic Church has had on Irish society as a whole and expressed a view that this had a significant impact on responses to allegations of abuse in schools run by religious orders.

> *'I have no doubt that there was corruption to cover up and protect sexual predators. The country we were living in was controlled as much by the Church as by the Government. I know we are moving away from that, but it must be acknowledged, and we must never go near that again.' (Participant)*

> *'How many Deputies came out of [religious order] schools? How many Ministers came out of [religious order] schools? How many people in positions of power in the Irish criminal justice system?' (Participant)*

> *'I was and remain angry about the cover ups of sexual abuse perpetrated against minors by clergy and even more by the complicity of the state in ensuring (so far) limits on the potential financial consequences for the Church, not because I have any personal interest, but I believe accountability matters and impunity is wrong.' (Participant)*

159. Some participants commented on the relationship between the Catholic Church and the State.

> The participant noted that the government handed power to the Catholic church, and he neither has faith in government nor politics. He is of the opinion that the government now have an opportunity to hold the Catholic church and institutions to account. *(Participant)*

160. A small number of participants stated their concern over the Department of Education's role in examining sexual abuse in schools run by religious orders. Some participants pointed out that although the schools were run by religious orders, most were funded in some way by the Department of Education.

> *'The Department of Education should not be the people investigating themselves.' (Participant)*

161. Some participants spoke of feeling a measure of cynicism about political will to hold people accused of sexual abuse and the associated institutions to account. One recounted how, when seeking the support of ministers in government, one response included:

> *'Ah sure they're old now, let them go.' (Participant)*

H. What Helped Over the Years

(i) Realising the Full Impact of Abuse

162. Most participants said that realising the impact of sexual abuse, and being able to share their experiences with others took many years. Participants described the relief they felt when they were finally able to share their experience of being sexually abused. Many explained that the support of partners and family members has enabled them to live overall fulfilling lives despite childhood sexual abuse.

(ii) Knowing That There Were Other Survivors

163. Many participants described hearing other survivors' stories on the news or in documentaries over the past decades as the moment when they realised they could tell their own stories. The realisation that they were not only one who suffered sexual abuse was described as providing them with strength and resilience. Some participants spoke of their great admiration for Mark and David Ryan who told their story in the RTÉ Documentary on One: *Blackrock Boys* and subsequently appeared on RTÉ's *The Late, Late Show*. These participants believed that revelations of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders would never have reached the broader public and many participants themselves would not have had the strength to share their own stories without this documentary. The view was expressed by participants who attended a range of different schools.

> *'He [Mark Ryan] was a lifeline and inspiration to all of us, certainly to me, who came forward to tell our stories. He was still trying to rebuild his life when his time here with us came to an end.' (Participant)*

> *'I thought "Wow, they actually have the courage to go on the radio and talk about that." That is the only reason why I am talking here today.' (Participant)*

164. This documentary is what motivated one participant to come forward and share his experiences with the Scoping Inquiry.

> *'It's wrong that it's only coming out now. I don't want anything like that to ever happen to anybody ever again […] I'd rather give someone like me the courage to not bottle it up.' (Participant)*

He went on to say that:

> *'It's only through the braveness of those two men on television that I'm sitting here today.' (Participant)*

165. Participants described how hearing about child sexual abuse impacted them:

> Upon hearing the radio speaking of child abuse, *'I said to my wife, 'I'm one of them.'* That was the first time the participant spoke of it. *(Participant)*

166. Another participant described the impact of a television programme in the late 1990s where, for the first time, they heard someone speak about sexual abuse:

> *'I remember lying down in the living room having a full body experience, trembling'. (Participant)*

167. One participant described a life-changing moment in 2010 when he witnessed an audience member disclose his sexual abuse on a national television show.

> *'I didn't tell anyone about it until 2010. I was watching Prime Time and there was a county councillor in the audience. He described the abuse that he had experienced.' (Participant)*

The participant went on to explain the impact and importance that that moment had for him.

> *'He's my hero. If he had not had that conversation on national television, there is zero chance that I would be here now.' (Participant)*

(iii) Finding Strength in Shared Experiences

168. Participants described finding relief, strength and empathy in sharing their experiences with other survivors. One participant described how being part of an online group for victims of abuse has been supportive for him:

> *'It's encouraging to see how many other pupils have found ways to move on. We're brothers in arms. We have had a shared bad experience, and I won't let it overwhelm me.' (Participant)*

Other participants described similar experiences:

> *'The shared experience and the help from my friends was so powerful.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Sadly, I now have met many men who have been sexually abused. I now know I am not alone, and I have a shared commonality with many others. This gives me strength.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It was a relief for me, that I had lads that understood what I went through.' (Participant)*

(iv) Disclosing Childhood Sexual Abuse as an Adult

169. Many participants spoke of bottling up their childhood experiences of sexual abuse for many years, often only disclosing what had happened when they reached a breaking point in their lives. One participant said it took a long time to tell his partner about what had happened. He described how he had tried to downplay the abuse as a way of coping but that it had a devastating impact across his life.

> *'I like to tell myself it wasn't abuse and normalise it. But it was'. (Participant)*

170. Participants described the difficulties of carrying their experiences:

> *'You put it in the back of your head, and you accept that it happened, but you don't deal with it, and it just comes to a point where you have to deal with it.' (Participant)*
>
> *'The hardest part was holding onto it for 36 years.' (Participant)*
>
> *'There was a huge internal conflict within me […] I gobbled up self-help books, not understanding why I was the way I was.' (Participant)*

171. Some participants spoke about significant mental health issues which resulted in their disclosing what happened.

> *'I started to get depressed. I didn't understand it. I wanted to stay in bed all the time, I thought I was just tired, but it crept up on me.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It didn't really start to come back into my head until I was having a difficult time at work. I was having flashbacks, but I didn't even know what was happening.' (Participant)*

(v) Supportive Relationships

172. Many participants spoke of the support they received from a spouse or partner:

> The participant now lives overseas and said that he does not think he has ever been happier. He has a partner who is a significant source of support, and it has been a huge benefit to him in terms of his overall health to have this relationship with a caring and understanding person. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant observed that their relationship with their spouse was a key support in dealing with the abuse they experienced. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I've been in the process of healing myself. I was lucky that my wife managed to stay the course and support me. Without that, I might have been dead in the early 1990s'. (Participant)*
>
> […] he told his wife, children, sister and brother-in-law about the abuse and they have all helped enormously. *(Participant)*

(vi) Counselling and Therapeutic Support

173. Many participants reported having engaged in counselling or psychotherapy, some for many years. Most spoke positively about their experience of counselling:

> *'I've been with a counsellor, and I know this isn't the case, but I had the feeling of being responsible or that I invited it.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I think my life is only really just starting and it's only through the understanding that it wasn't my fault and therapy.' (Participant)*
>
> *'The counsellor said to me in my 40s "it was not your fault". At that moment I felt the guilt I carried with me for so many years. I realised I was a victim in the situation. Her words freed me. Shame, guilt, fear are huge shackles on a youngster, and I experienced those things very intensely.' (Participant)*

174. Participants also spoke of how counselling and psychotherapy had helped them to gain insight into how the sexual abuse had affected them. One stated that:

> *'The positive thing from that, because I've been doing therapy, is that I'm able to name and recognise the behaviour. I'm very lucky to have that.' (Participant)*

157. Another explained that therapy has helped significantly:

> *'As I go on, I learn more about why I am the way I am.' (Participant)*
>
> *'It helps to have an increased knowledge of trauma, and how it affects you, and how the body holds onto it in some way.' (Participant)*

176. A small number of participants described the experience of counselling or therapy as negative or said that it had not helped them. Participants stressed the importance of counsellors and therapists being the right people to work with survivors of sexual abuse. One participant described a negative experience:

> *'The therapist said it didn't even sound like serious abuse, […] and I don't know how someone can say that' (Participant)*

177. Others discussed how, when they initially attended counselling, it felt like this was not the right time for them and the experience of recalling events from the past was simply too painful.

(vii) Finding Peace

178. A small number of participants shared their reflections on finding peace. Some participants characterised this as a kind of victory over the person who had abused them, saying that living a good life was a way to rise above the suffering caused.

> *'I'm okay now, I've had a good life. If I hadn't hit that rock bottom, I wouldn't be alive today. I consider myself one of the lucky ones. I'll be [age] in two months' time. I'm glad to get the weight off my shoulders now. I feel quite comfortable now. I'm the big winner here.' (Participant)*

> *'I decided to see myself as a survivor. His power over me was only there when I was an innocent young child and not as a grown man.' (Participant)*

179. In the last 12-18 months one participant has thought about the sexual abuse more but has never wanted to let it define him.

> *'I tried not to let it affect me much in later life, as I didn't want to give him the satisfaction.' (Participant)*

180. Participants were clear that any success they had achieved in life was in spite of the sexual abuse and a testament to their own strength of character:

> *'To have had my formative years so utterly corrupted by such an evil man, and to have eventually lived a relatively normal life, I regard myself as an extraordinarily lucky individual.' (Participant)*

> *'In recent years I am more relaxed and outgoing, and I wish I had always been like that. I wish Ireland hadn't been such a brutal place for children to grow up in.' (Participant)*

181. One participant felt that the most healing thing that he has been able to do for himself was to forgive the man who had done these things to him. He doesn't like this person, he doesn't have any positive feelings towards him, but he forgives him nonetheless; he says this was a very difficult thing to do.

(viii) Helping Others

182. Participants described supporting others in a variety of ways, both professionally and on a voluntary basis, with particular emphasis on helping other survivors of sexual abuse.

183. One participant described how his interest and work to ensure safeguarding of children has given him a sense of purpose and helped to address feelings of anxiety.

184. Echoing this, another participant described feeling that:

> His job now is to give back and to help others who are coming forward to speak about their experiences of abuse. *(Participant)*

The participant added that he finds advocating for others to be therapeutic.

185. Keeping children safe from abuse now was described as critically important to the majority of participants. Several said they had engaged in careers and voluntary activities associated with safeguarding children. Many participants spoke of their wish that no other child would ever have to go through what they did, and it was important for many participants to work proactively towards this aim.

186. One participant described how his early childhood experiences have given him a particular insight and empathy for working with vulnerable children and adults in his professional life and he has drawn on his experiences to help with educating other professionals working in this area.

Another participant described how:

> He feels somewhat reassured that processes are in place now to ensure it doesn't happen again. He was actively involved with the Board of his son's primary school for years to ensure that strong processes and procedures and safeguards were in place to ensure the safety of children in the primary school. *'There should be a level of due diligence in relation to any situation.' (Participant)*

187. Many participants spoke of their efforts to ensure that their children and grandchildren had the confidence and safety that they lacked as children. One participant noted the priority he places on ending the cycle of abuse with his generation.

> *'I have always said to my children and my grandchildren, that if anyone would abuse them, they should come to me. And in a lot of ways, the abuse ends with me, and it's not passed on to another generation.' (Participant)*

I. Chapter Summary

188. This chapter sets out the impact of child sexual abuse in adulthood, describing participants' reports of how the effects have reverberated through their lives and in some cases, through those of their families. The lasting and cumulative effect of sexual abuse was described vividly by survivors, and their accounts are in complete accordance with the impact of child sexual abuse described in the literature on this subject.

189. Many of the participants who have come forward to the Scoping Inquiry have described serious, persistent, life-changing and hugely damaging impacts of sexual abuse. The SAVI[1] report in 2002 recognised these types of impact, which persist well into adulthood and the accounts given by participants in this chapter describe such experiences.

190. In this chapter, participants described cumulative impacts on their mental and physical health, describing impacts on their relationships with families and friends, their ability to form new relationships and their sexual development. In some cases, participants spoke of their decision not to have children of their own because of the fear that they could not protect them. Others described feeling heartbroken and guilty after disclosing what happened to elderly parents.

191. Some participants described mental health problems and illness. Damaging coping strategies including problematic use of alcohol and drugs were described by many participants. Some described difficulties with people in authority, and others spoke of ongoing lack of self-esteem. Many said that these issues affected their opportunities for further and higher education, their employment prospects and ability to progress in chosen careers.

192. Participants spoke of needing to get away from places and people that reminded them of abuse and for some, this meant leaving their communities or emigrating. Many could not speak about what had happened to them for years, which compounded their difficulties.

193. Participants also spoke about their efforts to find some peace and to address what happened to them. Participants described their experiences of engaging directly with religious orders, with many reporting that these encounters caused them frustration and disappointment. Others described more positive experiences of receiving an apology or acknowledgement.

194. Some participants spoke of their experiences with the legal system, with many describing difficult processes which were often experienced as retraumatising. Other participants described their concerns about the role of the State in examining the issue of sexual abuse in schools and their lack of faith in the political system to respond.

195. Some participants spoke of finding strength in discovering that they were not alone and that support from other survivors had helped them. Others described how their own efforts to support other survivors had been a source of strength for them, and some spoke of their efforts to play an active role in safeguarding children today. For some participants, support from spouses or partners has been important.

---

1 Mc Gee, H.; Garavan, R.; de Barra, M.; Byrne, J.; & Conroy, R. *The SAVI report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland* (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, 2002). https://doi.org/10.25419/rcsi.10770797.v2

196. Many participants have engaged in therapy over the years and described the relief of being able to talk about their experiences, although for some participants the process of engaging with counselling did not feel beneficial. Talking about the experience of childhood sexual abuse and seeking help is recognised in the literature on sexual abuse as being difficult for survivors, but many participants described it as helpful. However, many describe healing as an ongoing process which requires therapeutic support.

197. The following chapter sets out participants' views on their preferences for what should happen in a government response to historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders.

Chapter 7:
What Participants Want to See Next

Content Warning: This chapter contains details of participants' descriptions of sexual abuse, physical violence, and reference to suicide. It may be distressing to read.

A. Introduction

1. Participants' views on how the State should respond to revelations of historical sexual abuse at day and boarding schools run by religious orders were described during interviews as part of the second stage of the Scoping Inquiry's Survivor Engagement process. Participants were given a booklet, '*Guide to Potential Government Responses*' in advance of their interviews which outlined approaches that have been taken in response to historical sexual abuse in the past.
2. As outlined previously, the interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions rather than a checklist of closed yes/no questions, and not all participants selected an approach outlined in the booklet. However, the majority of participants gave their views on the options with many selecting more than one as acceptable or desirable. Participants also spoke about what mattered most to them in a general sense and this did not always align fully with the identified options. People also suggested approaches other than those outlined in the booklet.
3. This chapter of the report of the Survivor Engagement process outlines the main priorities, preferences and concerns participants outlined regarding next steps. It also includes additional suggestions for actions from smaller numbers of participants.

B. General Principles Underpinning Participants' Views on Next Steps

(i) Early/Immediate Action:

4. Concerns were raised about the length of time that a future inquiry would take, with participants highlighting the age profile of many survivors and the importance that they see and receive justice within their lifetimes. Publication of the Report of the Scoping Inquiry was seen as a first step with early action on its recommendations.
5. A number of overarching principles were identified across participants' views, which are described in this chapter under the following themes:
    - Accountability – Type and scope of a future inquiry
    - Accountability – Financial redress
    - Experiences of the Legal System
    - Commemoration and Memorialisation
    - Other Recommendations

6. The greatest single matter identified by participants in relation to recommendations to government for future action was that of accountability. Participants wanted the religious orders to publicly acknowledge historical sexual abuse. They also wanted the general public to know what had happened, and they wanted ongoing improvements to ensure such abuse would not occur again. Overall, two main recommendations to accomplish this aim were holding a statutory inquiry and financial redress.

7. A brief summary of each theme is set out below and each area is then explored in greater detail.

(ii) Accountability – Type and Scope of Inquiry

8. The majority of participants who discussed the type of response they would like from government had a preference for a statutory inquiry into the historical sexual abuse of children in day and boarding schools run by religious orders.

9. When facilitators asked those who expressed a preference for a statutory inquiry as to what was important to them about an inquiry their responses included the following:

- For the public to know what had happened to them;
- To be believed;
- Compellability, including:
    - That members of religious orders would be required to appear at any inquiry
    - That documents and records would be required to be provided to any inquiry
- The proceedings of any inquiry to be reportable in the media;
- A published report of any findings;
- Transparency and reducing the ability for institutions to protect individuals, abusers and organisations.

10. Of those who wanted a statutory inquiry, participants discussed the options of tribunals of inquiry and commissions of investigation. Many those who wanted a statutory or public inquiry said they would be prepared to give evidence; however, many said they did not want to be cross-examined or challenged on their evidence as generally occurs in a public process. Many said they would only give evidence in private, and some said, based on previous experience with the legal system, that they would not participate in a public inquiry. Some participants said they did not have an opinion about what type of statutory inquiry was preferable and some participants expressed support for more than one type of statutory inquiry.

11. The majority of participants agreed that any inquiry should include a focus on the following key areas:

    1. What happened and who was responsible;
    2. Whether sexual abuse was covered up;
    3. What can be learned for the future.

12. Some participants wanted any inquiry to go further than identifying those who may have been involved in a cover-up and said that it should also seek to understand the circumstances that allowed sexual abuse to occur and to be hidden. Participants said that such an analysis would be an important learning opportunity for organisations now and would assist in assessing risk to children now and in the future. Some participants want any inquiry to include other bodies such as relevant organisations and government departments and some participants requested that the inquiry be broadened, to include psychological and physical abuse and to include the experiences of children who witnessed abuse of others.

(iii) Accountability – Financial Redress

13. Most participants were in favour of redress or a scheme to administer compensation while acknowledging that no amount of money can adequately compensate for the short- and long-term impact of sexual abuse on participants' lives.

14. Many participants did not express a view on how redress should be funded. However, a view that religious orders should pay or contribute was expressed frequently and participants had a preference for this to happen voluntarily without the need for legal action. Some participants identified that the State, if necessary, would need to reinforce this but some said that they did not want any more money spent on legal support. Some identified the State as also having responsibility and therefore thought it should contribute to a redress scheme.

15. Participants had different views on how redress should be administered, with some saying that it should be broadly proportionate to the harm caused, while others saying that differential costing for types of sexual abuse would be inappropriate. A suggestion of a two-tiered system was also proposed, depending on the severity of the abuse. Some stressed that consideration be given to the timely payment of compensation given the age profile of many survivors, and that for those survivors who may prefer it, a system of instalments should be available. A small number of participants suggested that redress could take the form of infrastructure to support survivors such as therapeutic services, and others suggested funding for education or specific state payments like a type of pension or other services. However, these were in the minority.

(iv) Experiences of the Legal System

16. Many participants spoke about the need to address concerns they have with the legal system to make it more accessible and appropriate for victims of sexual crimes, and participants recommended that some specific areas be reviewed or changed. These included:

- Increasing the pace at which legal proceedings are processed through the courts;
- Ensuring an alleged abuser's age was not used as a reason not to proceed with a legal case and greater transparency relating to decisions not to prosecute;
- Addressing issues relating to Non-Disclosure Agreements and the Statute of Limitations for civil abuse cases;
- Introducing guidance for cross-examination in abuse cases.

17. Some participants recommend a whole system review of how the courts manage sexual abuse cases, including historical child sexual abuse cases, in both criminal and civil proceedings.

(v) Commemoration and Memorialisation

18. Participants expressed support for some form of commemoration and/or cultural intervention that would honour the needs and legacy of victims and survivors. Examples given included independent trusts to provide free counselling and other supports for survivors and their families (which overlapped with similar suggestions for types of redress); the creation of an archive; the inclusion of the findings of any inquiry in the school curriculum; documenting the story of sexual abuse in documentaries or books; or the creation of a memorial garden or space where people could go to reflect on this part of Ireland's history.

(vi) Other Recommendations

19. A small number of participants offered many additional suggestions and initiatives for further action including enhanced child safeguarding and sex education; research funding for related projects; options of restorative justice; the divestment of schools; and supports in the courts for survivors of sexual abuse during and after a case. Some participants said there should be options for survivors to advise any further inquiry.

C. Accountability – A Statutory Inquiry

20. This section outlines the majority suggestions made by participants regarding any future inquiry. The *Guide to Potential Government* Responses booklet outlined potential next steps. These were divided into three sections in the booklet:

    1. Investigating What Happened
    2. Compensation for Harm Done: Redress and Other Supports
    3. Some Potential Alternative Approaches

21. As the interviews with participants were semi-structured, meaning that they did not follow a strict yes/no question format, some participants supported several approaches. Not all participants indicated interest in, or any preference for, these potential next steps. For those who did, an overview of their recommendations is presented here along with the reasons why participants had chosen these options.

(i) Participant Preferences for a Future Inquiry

22. The majority of participants opted for some form of statutory inquiry. Many did not have a preference for any particular type of inquiry and some said they did not want an inquiry (some participants opted for more than one choice). There was much overlap and nuance in the rationales given for participants' preferences. Some participants were clear in stating their preference for a tribunal or a commission, while others were less sure about the similarities and differences between these. However, there was a clear consensus in seeking accountability.

23. A key issue of importance described by participants was that a statutory inquiry would have powers of compellability, would be open to the public and the media, would be transparent and would ultimately issue a public report. However, participants also expressed concerns about such a process, including the implications for any adversarial legal process, such as being cross-examined or not believed, and having to give evidence in public, both leading to the possibility of being retraumatised. A minority of participants said that a statutory inquiry would not change what happened and wanted to look to the future instead.

24. Both a tribunal of inquiry and a commission of investigation are established on a statutory basis and have powers of compellability of witnesses and documents. Witnesses can be cross-examined in both settings. Both are transparent in their terms of reference and actions, and both issue a published report.

25. The main differences between commissions and tribunals are that tribunals generally involve greater fair procedure rights for participants, since a tribunal's default position is to hear evidence in public where allegations can have an immediately damaging impact on a person's reputation. However, a tribunal can sit in private if it is expedient given the nature of the inquiry or evidence to be given,[1] and there are some instances where a tribunal has done so.[2] In contrast, a commission generally allows parties to give evidence in private, and the minimum of fair procedures required in such a context are the opportunity to read and make submissions on a draft of a commission's report prior to its finalisation.[3] A tribunal generally does not circulate a draft of its final report because all of these rights, of representation in cross-examination and submission, have already been allowed in the course of its hearings. A commission can, however, hold hearings in public at the discretion of its Chairperson.[4] While, there is no case law on these provisions of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, the default position that, in general, a commission sits in private, but may sit in public if it decides to accede to a request by a witness to do so or, alternatively, the commission is satisfied that sitting in public is in the interests of the investigation and procedural fairness.

26. The key rationale for those who opted for a tribunal of inquiry was public access leading to transparency and compellability of witness and documents. However, notably, a commission of investigation would also provide for public access at the discretion of the Chairperson and has powers of compellability of witnesses and documents.

---

1 Section 2(a) of the the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921, as amended, ('**the 1921 Act**'): A Tribunal to which this Act is so applied as aforesaid shall not refuse to allow the public or any portion of the public to be present at any of the proceedings of the tribunal **unless in the opinion of the tribunal it is in the public interest expedient so to do for reasons connected with the subject matter of the inquiry or the nature of the evidence to be given** and in particular where there is a risk of prejudice to criminal proceedings. (emphasis added)

2 For example, the Morris Tribunal, http://www.morristribunal.ie/sitecontent_80.pdf , the Lindsay Tribunal into infected blood products: https://assets.gov.ie/42662/ea2b2faad3434d4fa7afed177c1bbb0f.pdf. and the Barr Tribunal http://www.mulley.net/BarrTribunalReport/BarrTribunalReportAppendix1.html.

3 See comments of Charleton J in the third interim report of the Disclosures Tribunal, p. 115: https://www.disclosuretribunal.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Third-Interim-Report.pdf

4 Section 11(1) of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004.

(a) Participating at a Statutory Inquiry

27. The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interview process meant that not all participants provided a view on whether they would attend to give evidence at either a commission or a tribunal. Many participants said that they would give evidence at an inquiry, but many also said they did not want to give evidence in public, with cross-examination seen as a cause for concern. For many, giving evidence was considered a duty and a public service, albeit a decision or opportunity that they would make with significant hesitance. Others gave a conditional yes to giving evidence but expressed concern about whether any inquiry was to be held in public or in private. Other responses indicated that the participant did not want to provide testimony in public or be cross-examined:

> The participant would be willing to speak publicly about their story. *'I am happy to help.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant doesn't think many will stand in court and tell their story, but if enough do it then he would be happy to stand with them – unless there is a groundswell, people won't be challenged. *(Participant)*
>
> *'Put me on the stand, I don't care. It has to come out.' (Participant)*
>
> He would not be comfortable with a public inquiry. Participation of orders should be compulsory. He would prefer a commission of investigation with a private hearing. *(Participant)*
>
> Future inquiries should be private, as a public inquiry could be extremely challenging. The participant would participate in a future inquiry, if needed. *(Participant)*

(b) Cross-Examination and Privacy

28. A point raised by those favouring a commission is that it allows for parts of the investigation to be conducted in private sessions without public or media attendance. Some participants noted that it also avoided the litigious nature of a courtroom-like engagement. The *Guide to Potential Government Responses* booklet notes that a commission involves cross-examination, but that this is only permitted at the discretion of the Chairperson and can be done in a setting that excludes the public and media, but includes the necessary legal teams.

29. All witnesses at a tribunal of inquiry and a commission of investigation can be the subject of cross-examination from relevant legal teams. At a commission of investigation, at the discretion of the chair, cross-examination can be curtailed where it is deemed unnecessary or can occur in the absence of the public and media.

30. The key rationale provided by people who support a commission was that the adversarial and court-like nature of a tribunal has the potential to retraumatise survivors. It was also noted by many participants that some people will not be comfortable participating in public and so should have the option of engaging in a private session. This rationale is explained in further detail below.

31. There was a broadly even split amongst those who favour a public process between those who said they would be willing to attend or give evidence themselves and those who would not be willing to do so. Whilst those in favour of giving evidence in this way spoke of their sense of public duty, the facilitators nonetheless noted some hesitation on the part of some participants. Other participants wanted to take part in a statutory inquiry but did not feel able to speak in public:

> The investigation should be taken out of the courts and conducted in a separate group/committee with stakeholders and survivors. The participant stated that it was retraumatising for him and others to be in court. *(Participant)*

32. A common reason given for uncertainty about participating in a public process was for the sake of privacy and the fear of family/friends finding out, as some participants have never told their families about what happened to them. Participants who selected a commission of investigation, rather than a tribunal of inquiry, frequently did so because they wanted the option to tell their story in a more private setting:

> '*I think I'd go for that option, in private. I wouldn't want that to be all out there. I think a mixture of public and private would be the best.' (Participant)*

> [The participant] recommended a commission of inquiry, because he agreed a more private and confidential inquiry into the sexual abuse experienced at boarding schools would be a good idea. The participant was uncomfortable with the idea of people knowing his business or having other people finding out about his past. *(Participant)*

33. Other participants suggested the confidential option offered by a commission, due to a fear of public speaking, a reluctance to be cross-examined or questioned publicly, and a fear of a negative impact on their own mental health:

> *'I would prefer a private inquiry. I wouldn't want to stand up in public, and I'd imagine many people would feel like that. I don't think I could, I wouldn't be able to deal with it. I couldn't see myself going up on a stand. I'd prefer it to be anonymous.' (Participant)*

> He was not comfortable with the idea of a public hearing because he would not be comfortable going public. A public process would be very difficult for the participant's own mental health. *(Participant)*

34. Participants who wanted a public process generally expressed the view that there needs to be a means to participate for those who are unwilling or unable to do so publicly. For the few participants who had no particular preference for a type of process, they similarly felt it should have both public and private options for participants to choose from:

> They are not sure if they would be able to speak in public but would be willing to discuss in private. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I think it has to do both [public and private hearings].' (Participant)*

(c) Public Access and Awareness

35. Participants were in favour of public awareness of a future inquiry and access was considered important. A tribunal is open to both public and media attendance. A commission of investigation can, at the discretion of the Chairperson, hold sessions in public and in private. Both types of statutory inquiry publish a full account of findings.

36. Public engagement and scrutiny were considered to be an effective way to examine the issue of historical sexual abuse in day and boarding schools run by religious orders and any subsequent cover-up.

> He would like the names of abusers, religious orders and the organisations and people who were complicit in the abuse to be named publicly. *'The light needs to be shone on who turned a blind eye.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Too much of this has gone on in private and the public needs to know.' (Participant)*

37. Public engagement is also a key aspect of challenging stigma and silence in relation to sexual abuse:

> The participant would like to see the conversation out in the public realm, to remove the taboo; *'it's the hush – hush that caused the problems in the first place.' (Participant)*

(d) Transparency

38. A further rationale for participants who want a statutory process was to aid transparency, as many participants reported experiencing a lack of transparency in their engagement with religious orders to date and some expressed concerns that powerful institutions had acted to protect those responsible for sexual abuse in the past. As discussed above, commissions and tribunals both have the power to sit in private and public and both publish their reports in full.

'We need complete transparency, and we need to cover all aspects. Each person who is traumatised by this needs to feel as though they are getting all the information.' (Participant)

'Anything that facilitates transparency; that will help move things in a more positive direction in the future is what is required. Transparency is a huge help. That is in the hands of the government.' (Participant)

The participant is in favour of a public tribunal, where there is transparency and oversight of what is happening. *(Participant)*

39. Media engagement was seen as important in facilitating public knowledge about what happened. The media can attend public tribunal hearings and can attend any public hearings of a commission.

The participant strongly believes the hearings must be held in public, and that wide media coverage is essential over the full timeframe of the work. This will keep the topic in the public's mind and the participant hopes, over time, the coverage will reach out to all those who have been abused and may not yet have come forward or may never come forward. The participant believes there are dozens, if not hundreds more victims who have never been contacted by inquiries to date. *(Participant)*

'We need to pull it out of the dark ages, because there is too much happening behind closed doors. Let anyone walk in off the street, including journalists from other countries so that they can write about what is happening in Ireland.' (Participant)

(e) Compellability

40. Another rationale for a statutory inquiry described by participants was that it would ensure the co-operation of religious orders. Both a tribunal of inquiry and a commission of investigation have powers of compellability. Participants felt that there is a need for a mechanism to compel engagement and presentation of documents.

The participant wants a public inquiry where all documents are made available. The participant is concerned that the religious orders had twenty years to get rid of documentation surrounding these cases. Nevertheless, the participant would like to see the documentation brought out. *(Participant)*

'[I want a] full public inquiry with legal powers to summon everyone who is mentioned and named by the victims.' (Participant)

(f) A Successful Outcome

41. The publication of a full and thorough account of the findings of a statutory inquiry was important to survivors, and many expressed the hope that this would provide a definitive overview of what happened, the extent of sexual abuse and an account of any attempts to cover this up. Both a tribunal of inquiry and a commission of investigation publish a full report.

> *'A definitive inquiry and statement need to be there at the end. I want to be able to look at it to say this was dealt with well.' (Participant)*

> [The participant] would welcome a publication by the state, highlighting the abuse that occurred within day and boarding schools run by religious orders. *(Participant)*

42. For others, there was a desire for findings of an inquiry to result in criminal prosecution of those who they believe have committed crimes but have not yet been held to account. However, there was an understanding that this in an unlikely outcome of the process.

(ii) Why Some Participants Do Not Want an Inquiry

43. The small number of participants who did not want any type of inquiry said that it was irrelevant to them, or that it would not make a difference or result in any real outcomes for them.

> The participant felt that abuse they experienced was so long ago and any options would not make a significant difference for them due to their age. *(Participant)*

44. For others there was a fear that engaging in any form of inquiry would be retraumatising:

> The participant did not recommend a tribunal or commission of inquiry, because they felt that the legal process was not respectful or supportive around the needs of victims and survivors. *(Participant)*

45. Some participants wanted to avoid the time that a commission or tribunal would take, and the expense to the State, and preferred to progress immediately to the implementation of consequences for the religious orders. Participants who raised this view highlighted that one of these consequences should be the reduction in power and influence of the Church through actions such as financial consequences or divestment of education.

46. One participant questioned the value of inquiries to add to what is already known at this point. The length of time and onerous nature of such inquiries on survivors was seen as excessive and often unsatisfactory.

> *'I think we know enough; the action is just about taking their power away and handing it to people who don't have a vested interest.' (Participant)*

47. Others who did not have a clear preference expressed a lack of belief that anything could be done.

> The participant said that he had read the booklet on options for different types of response, but he feels very sceptical that anything positive will come of such things. *(Participant)*

48. Some participants, while stating that they did not want any inquiry, also stated that they wished to see processes and outcomes that would be similar to a commission of investigation, in the sense that participants could speak in private without public or media attendance, and witnesses and documents would be compelled.

> The participant would also like to gain access to school records and files on the abuse to see how his incidents of abuse were presented. The participant would like to hear statements from the abusers themselves as some are still alive. *(Participant)*

49. Overall, participants' preferences for future government action were complex and nuanced. As outlined previously, a semi-structured approach to the interviews was used as part of a trauma-informed process, using some questions as prompts but allowing the direction of the conversation to be led by the participant. This meant that responses to the matter of how government should respond were not gathered in a standardised questionnaire and hence the analysis of responses and discussion reflect this approach.

50. The majority of participants told facilitators that they would like to see some form of statutory inquiry as part of a government response. The complexity is balancing the preference for a tribunal or commission with the general principles identified as being important to participants. A tribunal and commission have much in common regarding what participants said they wanted: an inquiry established on a statutory basis with compellability of witnesses and documents and a public report. The main difference relates to the inquiry being held generally in public or allowing for some sessions without the public or media presence. It is also likely a tribunal of inquiry would take longer than a commission.

D. Scope and Nature of Any Future Inquiry

51. There was a majority view amongst participants that any future inquiry should include a focus on the following key areas:

- What happened and who was responsible;
- Whether it was covered up;
- What can be learned.

52. This section of the chapter outlines participants' perspectives on the scope of a future inquiry. It outlines the importance of establishing a survivor-centred process and trauma-informed approach.

(i) Examining the Extent of Sexual Abuse and Any Possible Cover-Up or Collusion

53. Cover-up is generally understood to be the masking or concealing of an illegal act or situation from being made public. Collusion is understood as a secret co-operation for an illegal or dishonest purpose and is more often used in the context of high-level organised planned agreement or collusion between institutions. Some participants recommended that, in addition to investigating the extent of abuse, any inquiry should also explore the extent to which cover-up and collusion occurred.

> *'The best we can look at is a commission of investigation (statutory) which would do two things: look at the level of abuse and how many priests were involved; and the handling of abuse allegations. It is clear from survivors speaking about their experiences that people took their concerns to the abuser and the head of [school name] and they both denied the allegations to the faces of the children involved. It was not that they were unaware.' (Participant)*

> *'I am horrified by the way this has been dealt with. What Father X did to me, and to others, arose from his own personal weakness. You will always get people with personal weaknesses. It is the institutions which require adequate procedures in place to minimise the impact of those weaknesses. The problem I have is that this has been kept under wraps, concealed, and covered-up. That cover-up allowed further abuse to continue.' (Participant)*

54. The scope of any future process should also seek to understand who was aware of abuse and what actions they took in response. If no action was taken, the inquiry should seek to understand why.

> *'If the Irish government is going to do this properly, it has to be extremely broad reaching. It has to be in-depth: this is what the cleaner knew, this is what they did, this is what they tried to do, this is what the teachers knew, this is what they did.' (Participant)*

55. Other participants expressed a view that any future process should seek to understand the circumstances in a situation where child sexual abuse happened on a broad scale. This understanding can then be applied to different contemporary contexts and avoid repetition of such scenarios in the future.

> *'When there is a series of house fires, you don't just say that's terrible, look at the individual tragedies and empathise with those affected. Rather, we must look at the conditions under which the fires started and what prevention measures need to be taken. It is easy to overlook faulty wiring when documenting the horrors of a fire.' (Participant)*

56. Some participants also suspected co-ordinated actions or the possibility of a paedophile ring operating in some schools as discussed in Chapter 4. They wanted this issue included in the scope of any inquiry.

> *'I find it hard to believe there was no complicity. The fetish underwear we were made to wear fitted us as 12-years-olds. You need to have access to catalogues or resources to help you buy fetish clothes to fit little boys and you don't do that on your own. There must have been complicity and enabling and turning a blind eye. And I should not have been able to walk out of that priest's bedroom without questions being asked.' (Participant)*

57. Several participants had specific questions, about who knew or didn't know about the sexual abuse, and what decisions were taken based on that knowledge.

> The participant wants to find out what they did with the abusers. They transferred the Brother around the place, claiming alcoholism. He would like the [religious order] to say what happened to the abuser after it happened. *'They have questions to answer: How did he get into the school? How did he get into the dormitory part? How did they confront him after? What school did he go to next?' (Participant)*

58. Some participants wanted any future inquiry to engage with schools or religious orders where persons concerned were moved from one location to another to explore what happened in these schools. It was also suggested that all past students in affected schools should be contacted to support their engagement and to draw forth information.

59. A small number of participants stated that since the scale of abuse is well understood, the best use of resources is to focus on cover-up and collusion.

60. Participants were of the general view that the inquiry should examine how reports of abuse were handled by those in positions of authority, both within the schools and religious orders, but also within the wider community, including reports made to An Garda Síochána, health and social services and government departments.

> The participant described how historically the board of the school was mostly made up of priests from the school or elsewhere. These people held responsibility, and in their view were trying to keep everyone else out of the management of the school. Both the orders and school management are therefore responsible. *(Participant)*

61. Participants were clear that the role of state agencies and government departments should not be absent from the inquiry.

> *[The best that I can ask] 'is that the Government acknowledges its failings towards me and others, that the government is as accountable as the aggressors.' (Participant)*

62. Participants wanted any inquiry to examine communications and decision-making up through each layer of the religious hierarchies, including to head offices of religious orders and to the Vatican, where relevant. Some participants expressed concerns that full co-operation may not be forthcoming, reiterating the need for compellability.

(ii) Inclusion of Other Schools and Institutions

63. Some participants wanted the scope of a future inquiry to include other schools or institutions where child sexual abuse may have occurred. Some survivors noted that excluding certain sites or schools was potentially traumatising to those who fall outside of the remit of a future inquiry.

> The participant thinks that the scope of the Scoping Inquiry should be broadened and include all schools and not just those run by religious orders. He feels survivors will be left out of the inquiry as it doesn't include diocesan schools etc. *(Participant)*

'I hope that as a result of the Scoping Inquiry the government will launch a tribunal for all institutional abuse similar to 'The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse' that was held in England and Wales.' (Participant)

'This [Scoping Inquiry] is only looking at religious schools; it's exclusive to everybody out there who went to other schools.' (Participant)

(iii) Other Forms of Abuse

64. A small number of participants suggested that the inquiry should include abuse other than sexual abuse.

> The participant felt that the scope of the inquiry should be extended to physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. *(Participant)*

65. Participants noted, as discussed elsewhere in this report, an overlap between a culture of violence and sexual abuse. A view was expressed that including both within a future inquiry's scope is the best way to manage this complexity:

> *'I think physical abuse should be looked at too. There's no clear dividing line to me.' (Participant)*

66. While corporal punishment was legal until 1982, and to some degree, socially acceptable, many participants said that the violence experienced by pupils in some schools went beyond an acceptable level. Some felt that excessive disciplinary and day-to-day violence within schools should be included in a future inquiry.

> *'Acknowledge that corporal punishment was wrong and used as sexual gratification by abusers. Acknowledge that corporal punishment was used in excess and that this was criminal.' (Participant)*

67. Some participants suggested that the definition of sexual abuse also needs to be broad enough in any future process to include children witnessing the abuse of others.

(iv) A Survivor-Centred Process

68. Some participants spoke about the need to ensure that any future process is survivor-centred. There were a range of suggestions for how this could be achieved including:

- Providing options to give evidence that avoid cross-examination and retraumatisation;
- Providing individual and collective psychological supports;
- Involving and engaging survivors in the inquiry;
- Engaging international experts to support the work of any future process.

69. The sentiment about how a future inquiry should be conducted, shared by the majority of participants can be summarised in the following statement:

> *'The process of getting there shouldn't exacerbate the damage done and should be acceptable to people. The inquiry will bring things up again, so the process needs to be as safe as possible.' (Participant)*

70. Participants who had experienced criminal and civil proceedings spoke of their experience of being cross-examined, which many described as aggressive and traumatic, where legal teams set out to portray them as unreliable or dishonest. Adversarial cross-examination was viewed by participants as being retraumatising and inappropriate for abuse survivors.

> *'We put ourselves up there, then we are treated in the court like we are telling lies because they have to pick us apart to see if we're telling the truth. So, we suffer again when we go to court.' (Participant)*

> *'The adversarial court system is completely retraumatising for anyone who has been abused; that process of questioning and cross-examination – it's absolutely retraumatising and is absolutely not the right way to deal with the cases of abuse.' (Participant)*

71. Some participants described how the prospect of cross-examination would stop them from coming forward to a future inquiry as it would echo previous experience of telling their story and not being believed. To minimise the negative aspects where cross-examination in an inquiry is required, participants suggested:

- Accepting a criminal conviction as evidence for civil cases and for any future inquiry. This would allow for survivors to avoid having to give evidence again where criminal wrongdoing has already been established.
- Accessing records of previous trials and other records, such as the participant interview notes from the Scoping Inquiry, to reduce the need for survivors to give evidence at future processes.
- Establishing guidelines and training for lawyers to ensure that cross-examination in criminal and civil cases, or other processes, is sensitive to the needs of survivors of sexual abuse.

72. Participants' accounts included views on cross-examination:

> Unfair and harsh cross-examination which brings up things which are untrue or unrelated should not be allowed. *(Participant)*

73. Some participants expressed the view that in a future process, there should be monitoring or oversight to ensure that lawyers are operating within agreed parameters and that support is provided to victims as and when needed.

> *'I would recommend that there is a therapist in the room so that they can watch and make sure the process is not too triggering.' (Participant)*

74. Participants also recommended ensuring that survivors who are invited to give evidence to an inquiry, but who do not wish to be physically in the same space as their abuser, could be facilitated to avoid this as this is not always the case in court cases.

> It is unfair to have the person taking the case sitting across from their abuser in the hallways. *(Participant)*

75. In order to avoid issues such as this, a small number of participants suggested that the judiciary and others involved in leadership or decision-making positions, receive training in trauma-informed practice. This would assist in the management of an inquiry in a victim-centred manner.

> The participant highlighted the importance of trauma training for judges, and all involved in the process. *(Participant)*

(v) Psychological and Emotional Support

76. Participants recommended that individual psychological support be available for survivors who are appearing at any future inquiry. Where survivors have had counselling support and may wish to be accompanied by these professionals this should be facilitated.

> *'I think it should be absolutely compulsory that anyone who attends is supported by a psychotherapist or a counsellor and can also have a support person with them as well.' (Participant)*
>
> *'The criminal justice system needs to be more aware of how difficult it is for survivors to come forward. There should be a victim advocate within the judicial system who is there before, during, and after court to support the victim.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant stated that he would love to see more social and emotional support for people going through an investigation, a system of care for survivors having gone through the court process. *(Participant)*

77. It was also recommended that individual support extend beyond the emotional to offering survivors practical guidance and support as they engage with any future process.

78. One recommendation was that the process should facilitate the establishment of survivor peer support groups. While counselling and psychotherapy were considered as invaluable support, the healing power of shared stories was discussed by participants particularly in relation to reducing feelings of isolation and self-blame. Many participants recounted that it was only through hearing a range of others' stories that they understood that the sexual abuse they experienced was not their fault. A participant spoke of the experience of a group of survivors holding sharing circles:

> *'Every one of those men felt he benefited from that. In every story, you find identification for your story. He realises he is not the only one – it's not because I'm weird, or small or vulnerable. For instance, I was on the rugby team and quite big and strong but was still abused. I think it gave people the strength to realise that they were abused simply because they were children and not because of their personal traits or characteristics.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant feels peer support would be a great resource, but it would need facilitators to manage the group, and to hold what's happening. The groups would need a comprehensive management system in place to limit retraumatization as much as possible. Overall, he would like to see a normalisation of speaking about the abuse, and the opportunity to speak with other survivors in a safe space. *(Participant)*

79. This participant went on to say that what is of great importance to him is:

> *'Breaking down the stigma, silence and aloneness. I just see healing as the most important thing.' (Participant)*

80. Another participant spoke of the importance of peer support:

> *'There were times I asked myself why I put myself through that, 14 years the court case went on for, from the start of the investigation to the verdict. The collective support was so important for me. We were lucky to have each other.' (Participant)*

81. Some participants referenced the benefits of peer support groups for emotional support, practical help with navigating legal processes and potentially to identify possible witnesses. Peer communication was described as empowering for those adults who were isolated and alone in their experiences as children.

> The participant would like to see that some process is set up so that individual victims could contact each other. The [name of order] have a considerable advantage in that they know the details of related cases and witnesses which are vital for the victim to succeed. Obviously, they try not to divulge this. However, the victim does not have such information and if a process were set up where witnesses could consent to information being made available to others, this could help litigants. This process could ask first preliminary questions so that victims could establish if there are any closely related witnesses. e.g., in what year and circumstances did related cases exist. *(Participant)*

82. Participants also noted the benefit of a statutory inquiry to allow patterns to be identified.

> *'I don't think the court is the place to go on your own. If we had gone as a package as six individuals, it would've had a serious impact because people would've seen a pattern.' (Participant)*

83. However, some participants cautioned that any peer support processes need to be carefully considered so that lawyers acting in defence of religious orders cannot use this against victims in a legal setting.

> A peer support network should be set up. It would be very helpful. However, the participant has a fear that it would be used against survivors that they are coordinating a false story. *(Participant)*

84. Support and peer groups also play an important role in relation to providing aftercare, following the experience of giving evidence, or in any way participating in dialogue with religious orders or their representatives.

> The participant also pointed out that there should be support groups for survivors who go to court. He suggested making support groups more accessible for survivors especially after the court process. *(Participant)*

(vi) Use of Language

85. The issue of language was raised by some participants, with different views about the terms used to describe people who have experienced sexual abuse. Some participants recommended that terms that will be used in any future inquiry are discussed with survivor representatives, and that these, as far as possible, aim to represent the breadth of individual preferences.

> The participant commented on the department's use of the term 'survivor' in the Scoping Inquiry and suggested that survivors should be referred to as both 'victims' and 'survivors,' because he continues to experience issues as a result of this abuse. *(Participant)*

86. Another participant did not like the term survivor as it excluded those who have died through suicide or addiction related causes, as they did not survive. However, others noted that they do not wish to be referred to as victims.

87. Those who discussed this issue felt that any agreements on language should be explained to all relevant parties in any future inquiry, including lawyers and journalists.

(vii) Ensuring Quality and Good Practice

88. Some participants expressed concern that professionals involved in a future inquiry may not be able to operate impartially due to conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest could include being past pupils of the schools involved, having family currently attend or work in one of the schools or religious orders, or having personal or professional connections to the religious orders, or the broader Catholic Church.

> *'There is also a challenge in engaging with private legal systems in that many of key players have strong connections to [name of school]. There needs to be a stringent process of conflict-of-interest management, which assesses the personal and professional links to [name of school] for anyone involved in the tribunal to ensure fairness and transparency.' (Participant)*

89. Some participants also asked if it was appropriate that any future inquiry would be established by the Department of Education, as this department should also be the subject of scrutiny, given that widespread abuse occurred in the education system.

> *'Why are the Department of Education handling this? Should they be? Particularly given that they have a conflict of interest and may have a case to answer for themselves?' (Participant)*

90. To counter these challenges, there was a suggestion from a few participants that external or international expert advisors are engaged, which would also allow the process to draw from good practice elsewhere.

> Mothaíonn an t-agallaí go láidir nár chóir go dtiocfadh na daoine atá bainteach leis an bhfiosrúchán ón gcúlra inar cruthaíodh na fadhbanna seo ar an gcéad dul síos. Mothaíonn sé go mbeidh daoine atá neamhspleách agus a thagann lasmuigh d'Éirinn in ann dearcadh níos cothroime agus níos córa a bheith acu maidir le cad a tharla, ionas gur féidir cinntí a dhéanamh atá neamhspleách. *(Rannpháirtí)*
>
> The participant also feels strongly that the people involved in the inquiry should not be people who come from the culture that created these issues in the first place. He feels that people who are independent and come from outside of Ireland will be able to take a more balanced and fair view of what's happened, in order to make findings that are independent. *(Participant)*
>
> *'This inquiry must be conducted by a person or people who are not tainted by the moral morass which is the subject of the inquiry. No Catholic, no Irish person can be even-handed in this.' (Participant)*

91. Additionally, the application of an interdisciplinary approach to the planning and management of a future inquiry was recommended. Inputs from qualified and experienced experts from fields including counselling and psychotherapy, social science, trauma-informed practice and academia were recommended, along with inclusion of survivor inputs.

> The participant would like to see an expert panel composed of scholars, clinicians, practitioners and survivor advocates to act as a sounding board, information feed, and advisory group that all survivors can access during the future public inquiry. *(Participant)*

92. Other participants recommended a model similar to a confidential committee established as part of a statutory commission of investigation:

> The participant would like a collaborative system where cases were heard by a panel of social scientists, law experts, and therapists. This would avoid the courts. It needs to be victim-led. *(Participant)*

(viii) Survivor Engagement

93. Some participants suggested the involvement of survivors in an advisory capacity in a future process, to ensure that it is sensitive to the needs of survivors.

> *'I think what they need to listen to is what the victims want and if it fits into one of those models, well great. But if it doesn't, then make a new process.' (Participant)*
>
> *'I would dearly like to be part of a victim/participant advisory group to any proposed inquiry.' (Participant)*
>
> *'There needs to be a process to translate this into things for the victims. How do they get access to a recording of the data? A potential apology? Is the inquiry into information gathering? Is there an element of financial redress? All this has to be addressed with a victim-centred process.' (Participant)*

94. Participants said that any future inquiry should seek maximum participation of survivors. The challenges of creating optimal access for participation was viewed as operating at two levels. The first challenge noted was to ensure that there is adequate awareness of any process for both survivors of abuse, and others who may have worked in schools or be party to information on abuse or the cover-up of abuse.

> *'… how would people who do not necessarily read the papers know about this? I think it needs to go on to social media in some way. I didn't think it was advertised well. It needs to be advertised in parishes and on local radio.' (Participant)*
>
> Any future inquiry needs to be well advertised. *(Participant)*

95. The second challenge to accessibility for survivors was helping them feel that the process of engagement would be safe. This was considered especially important to people who haven't yet told anyone about their experiences of abuse.

> *'There must be people who haven't come forward. They need a safe haven where there is no judgement, and they are given advice about what they can do. They need to be told "you are now safe". That is critically important. There are people who can't come forward, because of the shame. A strategy needs to be formulated to address that.' (Participant)*

96. To address the challenge of getting in touch with survivors who may potentially wish to participate in any future inquiry, a number of participants recommended that either schools or survivor groups be enlisted to engage with potential victims or witnesses.

> The school is quick to acknowledge their achievements, but the school should find and invite past students and ask them if they were hurt. It is doable with technology today. The school is very wealthy. The school should go through databases and reach out to meet someone independent and talk about the experience. *(Participant)*

E. Accountability – Financial Redress

97. There is majority support amongst participants for financial redress. Redress was considered important in terms of accountability, both symbolically, and practically. Symbolically it was seen both as a formal acknowledgement of the sexual abuse experienced and of the responsibility of religious orders and other institutions.

> The participant viewed a redress scheme as a form of recognition by society. *(Participant)*

98. The practical role of redress was to compensate for the harm done and the subsequent losses incurred by survivors resulting from the abuse. While it was widely acknowledged that financial redress could not compensate for the damage done to people's lives, it was nevertheless considered to be a vital component of any future actions. Most participants who support redress did not specify who should fund it, but many said that they wanted to see the religious orders pay for compensation, as a demonstration of accountability.

> The money that survivors receive as compensation should come directly from the [name of religious order] to hold them to account for their actions. *(Participant)*

99. A smaller number of participants did not support redress or did not support it for themselves. They said that no money could make up for what had happened, while some said that although they did not want or need redress, they would support those whose lives would be improved by financial compensation. Some did not discuss the matter of redress.

100. While the overarching view was that financial redress should be put in place, challenges were noted around questions of hierarchies of payments, type of scheme, inclusion, and timeliness. Concerns also arose about access to a redress scheme where exclusion could risk retraumatising survivors.

(i) Redress as a Symbol of Accountability

101. Some participants discussed the symbolic importance of redress as acknowledgement of abuse and a marker of accountability on the part of the religious orders or the state.

> When the participant got compensation previously, it made them feel that they and their abuse were acknowledged. *(Participant)*

102. The practical issue of inclusion in a redress scheme was raised in terms of the importance, and difficulty, of acknowledging all survivors. Participants noted that while some boundaries must be set about who can engage with redress processes, this needs to be done with caution to avoid doing more harm or retraumatising people.

> Redress can cause more pain if people are left out, and this needs to be avoided. However, redress can play a role in having acknowledgement of what happened*. 'It's not about the money, it's about the recognition, it's about people listening to you.' (Participant)*

103. Linked to this symbolic importance of acknowledgement was the belief that any process should be as accessible as possible and should have a simple process that was not overly restrictive or difficult to navigate.

> *'Make access to redress non-complicated.' (Participant)*

104. A small minority of participants were not in favour of redress as a symbolic marker of acknowledgment.

> The participant thought redress was of limited benefit, and that it is much more important to deal with this issue at the level of the national psyche. *(Participant)*
>
> *'What's taken is taken, and no amount of money is going to bring that back. Financial retribution is of no interest to me.' (Participant)*

105. Others spoke about redress as not something they personally needed, either in terms of financial support or acknowledgment, but that they knew other survivors required both to have a decent quality of life.

> The participant didn't feel strongly about a compensation scheme for himself but felt it would be important for others. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant said that he wasn't interested in retribution or redress, but that if he could help others that were much worse off than him then he would help in whatever way that he could. *(Participant)*

(ii) Practical Considerations

106. Participants frequently spoke of how a sum of money could not be put on the loss of human potential, whether in career, relationships or in the ability to feel connected, self-assured or happy.

> *'It's hard to quantify what you lost.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant felt that no redress scheme could compensate people for the abuse experienced, and the process of trying to quantify or put a price tag on the impact of abuse is impossible. *'What can compensate for my life being taken from me? How do you quantify? Is there an algorithm?' (Participant)*

107. However, despite the fact that redress cannot equal the harm caused to people's lives, there was general support for redress as part of a suite of measures that participants want to see established. A small number of people saw redress as something that should fund support infrastructure for survivors such as therapeutic services, or dedicated payments along the lines of a pension-type scheme with other benefits for health and education, but most participants were in favour of payment of compensation. Participants were clear that the abuse and its impact had a practical and material impact on people's lives:

> *'I want monetary redress because what happened to me has ruined me mentally, physically and monetarily.' (Participant)*

This participant added:

> *'I'm now left with nothing. Money won't cure me, but it will help a bit.' (Participant)*

Another participant said:

> *'This should not be about money. You can't pay damage to hurt. If they offer something, I'll take it, but overall, it's not about money because you can't compensate.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant said that for him personally, redress is the only option in the booklet that he would see as being of interest to him at this stage of his life. *'Everything that I've had to do, I had to do it for myself.' (Participant)*

(iii) Who Should Pay for Redress

108. Many participants thought it was appropriate and important that religious orders should pay for, or substantially contribute to redress. This reflected participants' views of the need for accountability, and redress was seen as symbolic of accepting responsibility. Some survivors expressed the view that as legal accountability may be limited by the fact that many of those responsible for sexual abuse are deceased, financial accountability was important.

> The religious orders should be held to account and the agreed redress amounts should be paid without hesitation by religious orders. Enforcement of payments should be implemented. *(Participant)*
>
> *'The best apology is to compensate people. Words mean nothing, people don't believe them anyway.' (Participant)*
>
> *'[Religious orders] need to feel the pain of legal or financial consequences.' (Participant)*
>
> *'The religious order should pay for everything. It's their fault, it's their mess.' (Participant)*

109. Participants felt that the religious orders are concerned about wealth, and this is the only way to impact the organisation as a whole.

> *'I'm not interested in getting money – unless it's hurting their [religious order] pockets, they're not getting the message.' (Participant)*

110. It was noted by some participants that the burden of redress should not fall on the taxpayer, although others felt that the State also had a duty to contribute.

> *'I don't see why the Government, or the taxpayer, should have to put their hands in their pockets.' (Participant)*

111. A number of participants were clear that, ideally, religious orders should pay for redress voluntarily. In the event that this does not happen, some participants expressed the view that the State should use any legally available mechanisms to compel contributions from the religious orders to compensation. Some mentioned the assets of religious orders and how these might be used to pay for redress. Many recognised that this is a legally complex area.

> The participant highlighted that the government should be encouraging [religious orders] to do the right thing and not to create more upset through the process. *(Participant)*
>
> *'It would be better for everyone if redress was voluntarily made as it would indicate that the Church has the intention of being sorry. I would not feel comfortable with the taxpayer coughing up money for redress.' (Participant)*

112. A small number of participants considered it appropriate that the State contribute towards redress costs.

> The participant strongly believed that due to state funding of schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church, there should be redress. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant would like redress as well as recompense from the Minister for Education for letting this happen under their watch. *(Participant)*

(iv) Redress as a Survivor-Focused Process

113. A number of difficult and occasionally contradictory issues arose in relation to redress in participant interviews. These include establishing a trauma-informed process that minimises engagement in the legal system; the complexities of scales or hierarchies of payments; efforts around inclusion, as noted above in relation to acknowledgement; and timeliness.

114. A number of participants recommended that redress be established in a way that avoids, where possible, a reliance on lawyers. Some expressed the view that avoiding legal fees could result in a more cost-effective process but also one that was more acceptable to survivors.

> The participant was clear that they were not in favour of a solution that involved solicitors, as they '*get more out of these processes than victim-survivors'*. The participant preferred to have a meeting with someone to work out an appropriate form of compensation. *(Participant)*
>
> Redress should be kept out of the legal system because otherwise it's just the barristers making the money. This can also be very painful. It needs to be simple and focused on the needs of people who have been abused. *(Participant)*

115. Other participants said that there may be other ways of managing redress so that the process felt less adversarial and more empowering, allowing survivors to tell their stories and feel heard without an adversarial experience. The possibility of having decisions made by a redress board, who engaged directly with survivors, and which was made up of relevant and diverse disciplines was raised a number of times.

> *'You've got to find a way to make redress personal. A person needs to be able to share their history and have it acknowledged. And then have experts, a consistent body of experts, they will introduce a level of fairness and objectivity.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant felt strongly that there should be some kind of mediation process for awards of compensation or redress, and that it should not be a process where people seeking compensation are *'treated like criminals or subjected to gagging orders and very legalistic processes.' (Participant)*

116. A participant highlighted a need for any process to avoid becoming an unintended prompt that makes people feel they need to tell a worse story than the one they lived through.

> His preference would be for a redress scheme that does not cause people to talk up their pain and trauma, but targets support at those who are experiencing hardship. *(Participant)*

117. Participants spoke of the difficulties of establishing levels of compensation in a redress scheme and described their views that a hierarchy of payment levels depending on type or nature of abuse is demeaning. Referring to previous redress schemes, one participant said:

> *The obscene tariffs of compensation that appear to have been negotiated such as X amount of euros for oral rape etc. should be scrapped and replaced with something more humane and sensitive.' (Participant)*

118. Another participant had a similar perspective:

> [The participant] commented that it is not appropriate to have a *'menu of payments'* as this can be insulting to people and their experience and oversimplifies the idea of abuse and its impact. '*Anal fingering is worth this much … it's a demonic way of seeing things.' (Participant)*

119. Some participants expressed the view that any redress should have flat rates of compensation, or should assess the impact of sexual abuse rather than the nature of the abuse:

> *'Something like a basic sum of money which recognises that people who have come forward as survivors should receive a sum of money. If you've been abused, there is a sum of money there. A panel to be formed to look at particular cases to ensure fairness. The vast majority get a basic level, but then if it is more serious, the option for review to establish a different amount.' (Participant)*
>
> *'Also, with a financial redress the problem may be that some people will get more than others and survivors will start comparing. Abuse cannot and should not be measured that way.' (Participant)*

120. A number of participants made the point that if the amount of compensation is too low, this ceases to be a positive symbol of accountability and that the amount needs to be sizable enough to make a difference in someone's life. Others supported a redress scheme but expressed ambivalence about the potential for financial compensation to make a difference:

> '*If you think money is the answer, meet the people who got the money and ask them if it was the answer'. (Participant)*

121. Other participants said that, where relevant, compensation should, at least, be equivalent to refunding fees paid for private education, adjusted for inflation.

> The participant added that refunds should be issued for tuition paid to the schools where abuse happened. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I also suggested they [the religious order/school] were negligent in their care of me as their student, so they should refund my parents, and pay damages to me. That should be the minimum. They said that was completely unrealistic.' (Participant)*

122. Some participants stated that the calculations for compensation should consider lost earnings due to the impact of sexual abuse on education, career and the expense of dealing with the aftermath of abuse.

> The participant felt that reparation was important but that it was nowhere near adequate in his case given that his career was destroyed. He felt that a 'just economic settlement' was needed to compensate for what had been lost. While he felt that the restorative justice model works emotionally and spiritually, financially it does not. The characteristics of each case needed to be looked at in the calculations, ensuring they were realistic, taking account of years lost and careers lost. *(Participant)*

123. Some participants highlighted their wish that any process, including redress, would be introduced in a timely manner as many are older and time is an issue for them.

124. Some participants said that one way to ensure timely action is to run an inquiry and redress concurrently.

> The participant recommended a redress scheme, which would be separate and independent from the tribunal of inquiry. The participant recommended that this redress scheme should be established simultaneously and run concurrently with the tribunal of inquiry, so that survivors who are awaiting redress should not need to wait until the tribunal of inquiry has concluded or the Department has published a report on its findings, and it should not be dependent on the outcomes or determination of the tribunal of inquiry. *(Participant)*

125. Other suggestions made by participants included that consideration be given to providing instalments or regular payments rather than lump sums in a redress scheme for those who choose.

126. A small number suggested that alternative compensation structures, other than lump sum payments, be considered.

> Redress schemes should fund infrastructure (such as mental health supports) that support the needs of those who have suffered instead of issuing lump sums to individuals. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I don't think it's going to help me mentally either [the money]. I think we are way under-funded for mental health. There are so many people out on the streets that could be helped. Money will only satisfy some aspects of your life.' (Participant)*

127. Some participants said that consideration should also be given to the nature and impact of any payments previously made to individual survivors and that such payments should not exclude survivors from applying to any new redress scheme.

128. Finally, some participants recommended that in the instance where survivors are elderly, there should be provision for compensation to be made to their immediate family, who in many cases experienced intergenerational trauma as a result of the impact of their parents' experiences. Others said that if they passed away before any redress mechanism is established, they would want their children to be able to receive any payment that they would have been due.

> The participant thinks redress should also be included, which includes provision for people to assist their children where they have been affected, saying: *'Some people who have been seriously abused should get some form of compensation for the trauma that they have experienced, and that carries on through the generations.' (Participant).*

F. The Legal System

129. Many participants spoke about concerns with the legal system and recommended that efforts be made to make it more accessible and appropriate for victims of sexual crimes. Some participants recommended a whole system review of how the courts manage sexual abuse cases.

> *There are so many things that are wrong, the criminal side, the civil side, every part of the legal thing is wrong. If I went across the road and was hit by a car, witnesses would be called, a report written, and compensation paid. Why are we being persecuted because we were abused when we were small? I want the whole system reviewed. (Participant)*

(i) Increase the Pace of Legal Proceedings

130. Most participants who expressed a view on legal proceedings recommended an increase in the pace at which legal proceedings are processed through the courts, particularly in civil cases.

131. A participant expressed the view that the difficulty and duration of these cases means that it can be difficult to get legal representation.

> *'There is something about when the legal system gets involved. Everything gets slowed down, with 1000-page reports, nothing gets done.' (Participant)*

132. A number of participants shared their experiences with delays in the criminal legal system, and their sense of frustration with this. One spoke of long delays and said that they had been waiting for almost a decade for a trial.

> *'There needs to be more judges and more court sittings.' (Participant)*

(ii) Age of Alleged Abusers and Decisions Around Prosecution

133. An issue of concern for participants was the perception that the law allows an abuser's old age to be used as a reason to not proceed with a criminal prosecution. This was particularly pertinent in the sexual abuse of children when, due to the very nature of the crime, victims may not be able to come forward for many decades. Participants expressed the view that they should not be denied justice simply because the perpetrator is elderly.

134. The question of whether a criminal trial after a long period of delay will be prohibited as a breach of the accused's constitutional rights is concerned with the loss of evidence and the fading of the memory of witnesses, and whether it will be possible for a fair trial to be held in those circumstances. The Director of Public Prosecutions ('DPP') also has a discretion whether to prosecute, and she may consider the advanced age and/or the physical or mental incapacity of an accused person in exercising that discretion.

135. Participants expressed the view that crimes of a sexual nature against a child should always be prosecuted, irrespective of age.

> *'They should suffer for what they have done.' (Participant)*

136. Relatedly, a number of participants expressed the view that if any abuser is still alive, and civil liability has been established for abuse or any cover up, then they should be prosecuted and/or removed from their current positions where relevant, and another said that any perpetrators who are still alive should have to face criminal investigation.

137. An accused person has a constitutional right to a trial with reasonable expedition and there can be concerns about the fairness of a trial where there has been a significant passage of time since the alleged offence was committed. However, there is a growing awareness that the impact of child sexual abuse can inhibit a complaint being made and this is a factor taken into account in the context of any application to prohibit a criminal trial on the basis of delay.[5]

(iii) Non-Disclosure Agreements and Statute of Limitations

(a) Non-disclosure Agreements

138. Non-Disclosure Agreements ('**NDA**') are confidentiality agreements made following a settlement in a civil action. Some participants viewed these as obstacles to making criminal complaints to An Garda Síochána and some saw them as obstacles to speaking to the Scoping Inquiry. These agreements were viewed as a mechanism to silence survivors, to protect individuals who had committed criminal acts and to protect the reputation of organisations. Some participants expressed the view that the use of NDAs in child sexual abuse cases has the effect of hiding important truths from the public. Some suggested that NDAs be disallowed in civil cases or settlements concerning child sexual abuse.

> *'If schools or institutions have used mechanisms to restrict public access to information such as non-disclosure agreements then this should be publicised as regards past use and outlawed promptly as regards future use.' (Participant)*

139. The participant went on to add that:

> *'Publication of certain facts (e.g., number of complaints and number of known non-disclosure agreements) might also enhance awareness and improve behaviour. Transparency is a great help in improving behaviour.' (Participant)*

140. Another participant said:

> *'I've seen and I've heard people who have had to sign "gagging orders." There were people who got redress but could never talk to anyone about it regarding other compensation schemes.' (Participant)*

5 See e.g. *P.O'C. v. Director of Public Prosecutions* [2000] 3 I.R. 87; *S.H. v Director of Public Prosecutions* [2006] 3 I.R. 575.

(b) Issues with Historical Cases

141. Some participants spoke of the difficulties of prosecuting crimes of historical child sexual abuse due to the passage of time. There is no Statute of Limitations relating to criminal cases; however, there is a balance to be struck between a constitutional right to a trial to take place within a reasonable time frame and the impact of child sexual abuse on a person to make an early complaint, as outlined above.

142. Some participants expressed a view that there should be greater transparency around decisions not to prosecute in cases of child sexual abuse.

> After the participant spoke to the Guards, a file was sent to the DPP, but they never pursued the case. The participant was not the only one who reported abuse, so he was surprised that the DPP didn't pursue the case. *(Participant)*

143. Some participants expressed concern about the Statute of Limitations and non-disclosure agreements relating to civil cases. The Statute of Limitations 1957 was amended in 2000,[6] which amendment provided that the running of the limitation period is suspended in the case of a survivor of child sexual abuse where they are suffering from a psychological injury that was caused in whole or in part by abuse suffered as a minor, and that such injury constituted a 'substantial impairment' of their ability to bring proceedings or to make a reasoned decision.[7] Nevertheless, a person who is seeking to take a case many years after the alleged offence has to establish to the satisfaction of a court, by expert evidence if necessary, that he or she has suffered from a psychological injury, and that this constituted a substantial impairment on his or her ability to make a reasoned decision or to bring proceedings. It should also be noted that where a person recovers from such a psychological injury, the limitation 'clock' will start to run again.

(iv) Introduce Guidance for Cross-Examination

144. Many participants felt strongly that cross-examination in child sexual abuse cases frequently retraumatises victims. Defence techniques used to challenge victims were experienced as dishonest in that they seek to frame the victim's testimony of, for instance, not recalling certain details, as unreliable, when in fact this is an expected response when a significant time has elapsed. Participants recommended the development of guidance, and its enforcement for cross-examination in sexual abuse cases.

> The lawyers should have stringent rules on how they cross-examine the victims, as they themselves can be the aggressor when carrying out their line of questioning. *(Participant)*

6 Statute of Limitations (Amendment) Act 2000.

7 Section 48A of the Statute of Limitations 1957, as amended by the 2000 Act.

> [The participant] spoke about being cross examined and how he had to fight to be believed. Cross-examination was brutal and he was challenged by the defendant barrister that his difficulties now were not as a result of the sexual abuse he had experienced. He refuted this. *(Participant)*

145. Participants noted that prior experience of adversarial cross-examination is a major factor in considering the options presented for any future inquiry and their likely participation in such a process.

G. Commemoration and Memorialisation

146. Many participants expressed support for commemoration while a very small number said they were against it or expressed ambivalence. This section outlines a range of options for public commemoration and memorialisation proposed by a small number of participants but all with the same goal of acknowledging and remembering the experiences of children sexually abused in their school environment.

147. Those in favour viewed memorialisation as having an important purpose for survivors and the public, acting as a reminder of what had occurred, and helping to ensure that it never happens again. Memorials were also seen as providing a place where people can come, individually or together, to remember and pay their respects to victims and survivors.

> Considering the number of victims, a memorial piece that is a reminder of what happened in the past could be beneficial. *(Participant)*

> The participant suggested a memorial, which would serve as a reminder to future generations to remain vigilant and make sure this abuse did not happen again. *(Participant)*

> Things like memorials/gardens etc. to remember what happened are very important. They are symbolic and that is all they are, but they are important. Remembrance is really important. It must be genuine. These things are cheap when they are not backed up. Survivors must also be respected in processes. *(Participant)*

(i) A Living Archive or Museum

148. A number of participants recommended assisting survivors and the public to access information through a comprehensive archive in relation to historical sexual abuse in schools.

> The participant said that he thought that a "living archive" of the abuse testimonies is a good idea and said that it should be part of the school curriculum, *'so that it doesn't just end up on a library or government shelf.'* He said that in another 20 years, all the victims will be dead, and the story will be forgotten, unless it is taught in the schools. *(Participant)*

> The participant suggests the establishment of a centralised library of records of abuse. This would involve moving all the records in institutions so that they are accessible for those who experienced abuse to be able to see them. *(Participant)*

> *'The establishment, with agreement, of a Public Archive of these stories and accounts. It could be anonymous, if necessary and requested, and without locations or names, if necessary, but a fully accessible public record.' (Participant)*

149. Others outlined how a museum or permanent exhibition would be an appropriate method to support public remembrance.

> *'At the end of the display you would say "oh, I understand this better". I am not sure how many parents would allow their children to see these exhibits, but it would be educational.' (Participant)*

150. A few participants spoke of the importance of survivor engagement and suggested that survivors be involved in producing artefacts or art for museum exhibits.

(ii) Books or Documentaries

151. The role of books or documentaries as a useful way to record and share the story of sexual abuse was mentioned by a number of participants.

> The participant explained the importance of acknowledgement of the events through cultural expression such as books on the topic, walks or events. '*That cultural acknowledgement, ultimately is the end line for some people.' (Participant)*

(iii) Events and places of remembrance

152. Some participants talked about the importance of providing survivors, and those affected by sexual abuse, with an opportunity to come together to remember and to heal. The suggestion of public events was often connected to the development of accessible spaces, purposefully designed to support reflection and commemoration.

> *'Hold a reconciliation day of healing for abuse victims; government departments can attend if they want.' (Participant)*

153. Participants recommended that a memorial be established for survivors and those that died by suicide following sexual abuse. Participants frequently spoke with great sadness of their classmates who they either strongly suspected or knew were abused, and who did not survive.

> The participant felt a memorial service would be appropriate, particularly for the significant number of people who were abused who are now dead. '*They will never speak. Maybe people could remember that.' (Participant)*

154. Public sculpture as an appropriate means to remember the failings of the state in protecting young people was recommended by a small number of participants.

155. The role of having a safe space that supports people to attend and reflect was also discussed by people who recommended a garden or a forest be established in commemoration.

> The participant would also like to see an oak tree planted for every child that was abused, in a forest which is accessible to the public and serves as a memorial to the survivors and victims of abuse. *(Participant)*
>
> *'Just a nice, quiet place for victims and their family members to sit and feel that Ireland recognises the wrongs that were done and is sorry.' (Participant)*
>
> *'[I would like to see] some sort of commemorative garden or park or space that has annual events, funded by religious orders. There is something about beautiful spaces and peaceful spaces where people can go on their own or can gather to meet, it somehow connects people with the grief and the loss. There is a huge amount of grieving needed here.' (Participant)*

156. The location of memorials was mentioned by many as being key to their wider meaning. A number of participants stated that memorials should be placed on the site of the schools where sexual abuse occurred or their sports fields being named for victims of sexual abuse as a way to highlight their accountability, as well as the intent of these schools to safeguard children into the future.

157. A participant suggested that some sort of memorial in the grounds of the Department of Education would be important.

> *'A constant reminder to those that supervise that they have a duty of care to the children of Ireland.' (Participant)*

158. Others said that schools and other institutions need, where relevant, to remove plaques or rename halls or buildings where there is any association with sexual abuse.

159. Another participant spoke about the treatment of buildings where a significant amount of sexual abuse was perpetrated and that it would be appropriate to knock these buildings down entirely.

> The participant would like to see the cloakroom of the old school knocked down. (*Participant)*

160. There were a small number of participants who expressed ambivalence about memorialisation. The general perspective within this group was that it was not a priority, and that other actions focused on an inquiry or redress would have more meaning.

> The participant is not opposed to a memorial garden or statue honouring the victims, but this was not considered to be a high priority. *(Participant)*

161. Another group of participants expressed the view that memorialisation was insignificant or held no meaning for them; nor would it achieve the practical outcomes that they hoped for from other processes.

> The inquiry should be meaningful, and a memorial wouldn't achieve anything. *(Participant)*
>
> *'I think a national day of remembrance is nonsense.' (Participant)*

H. Other Recommendations

162. A number of participants expressed support for a trust or fund to be established to provide resources for a range of supports for survivors, and to fund actions and research in relation to child safeguarding.

(i) Actions to Promote Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing

163. Whilst child protection and safeguarding legislation and processes have improved significantly in recent decades, participants nonetheless spoke of the need to protect children now.

> Greater preventative measures in schools, including auditing of safeguarding practices in schools to ensure that they are followed. *(Participant)*

164. Some participants recommended increased vetting measures for people who work with children, as current measures were seen as insufficient.

> The participant is keen to see stricter vetting of the people that have access to children through education. *(Participant)*

165. Participants also felt that there needs to be an increased awareness of child sexual abuse in order to prevent it.

> It is also very important for them to raise awareness about child abuse and about the perpetrators. [The participant] made it clear that they believe real safeguarding is mandatory for anyone who comes near children. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant feels that the Government should make every effort to educate children about disclosing abuse and how to protect children from predators. *(Participant)*

166. In addition to increasing safeguarding protections within schools, some participants said sex education in schools needed to be improved so that children can better distinguish between problematic and healthy behaviour.

> The participant would like to see children receiving education on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour as a standard part of the school curriculum. *(Participant)*

167. Speaking on this topic, another participant recommended that this kind of education begins in primary school.

> *'People say children shouldn't be exposed to that [sexual education in school]. But if you talk to them about it maturely, they are resilient. If those conversations take away fear and empower them to recognise signs of damaging sexual behaviour. It should happen at primary school.' (Participant)*

(ii) Research into Understanding of Causes of Sexual Abuse

168. Participants also referenced the role of research to increase knowledge on risks and how safeguarding can mitigate such risks. Some said that research should focus on the causes and enablers of sexual abuse to better support the recognition of potentially dangerous situations, cultures or practices in the future.

> *'I want to see an analysis of where power disparities were exploited, and vulnerable children and adults suffered needlessly, and programmes in education to address this.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant called for a sociological understanding of its [child sexual abuse] prevalence in Ireland, to understand why it occurred among religious orders. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant would like to see a wide-scale study conducted on the abuse that took place in Irish institutions generally, to glean an understanding of why this happened. *(Participant)*
>
> The participant suggested an ongoing research award around drivers, prevention and impacts of child abuse, along with an annual lecture to keep the issue on the agenda. *(Participant)*
>
> Firstly, running a learning conference about risks and future prevention with international experts in institutional abuse, and engaging the orders, policy makers, experts by experience and leaders in governmentt and civil society. Secondly, a trust fund or memorial fund for academic research about risks of abuse in institutions and future prevention, which provides scholarships / academic awards for individuals conducting research on abuse risk and prevention. Thirdly, the establishment of annual awards for journalists doing deep dives on the issue of risk prevention and institutional abuse. Fourth, a whole population mixed method study (qualitative and quantitative) that explores the broad impact of experiences of humiliation, harassment and abuse in relation to the church, its rituals and power structures. Fifth, the initiation of an ecumenical process, where churches are brought together and supported to learn about risk reduction approaches. Sixth, the organisation of learning orientation future focused events, where the "methods" or "rituals" of abuse are named and focus group discussions with witnesses take place. *(Participant)*

(iii) Restorative Justice Practices

169. A small number of participants commented on restorative justice (RJ) in general, and some who had direct experience recommended the process. The reasons suggested by participants as to why restorative justice could be a positive experience included the following:

- It could be useful in relation to assisting survivors to speak about and feel heard in relation to their experiences;
- It could help survivors attain compensation without an adversarial legal process.

170. Conversely, others said that restorative justice should not be progressed as an option, as their experiences of it had been negative, and they did not believe that it could be a genuine or meaningful process. Participants without direct experience of the restorative justice process also expressed both positive and negative attitudes towards it as an approach.

171. For participants who had direct experience of restorative justice, some felt that it was positive and had facilitated survivors to tell their story and to feel heard, which was considered useful to their healing process.

> *'Sitting with the perpetrators' representatives and acknowledging the failures of the perpetrator and providing a personal apology has been helpful. [But] all of us need further therapeutic counselling.' (Participant)*

> The participant doesn't want to take legal action and feels the restorative justice experience he had with the school was satisfactory. *(Participant)*

172. Other participants said that they did not have a positive experience. In some cases, this was due to the impression that the process lacked real care or concern from the religious orders. Participants recommended that significant care be taken in establishing any future form of restorative justice where survivors and members of a religious order are engaging, to ensure that the process supports healing rather than causing another instance of harm.

> There was no real apology or learning. This could be harmful to others if not managed very carefully. *(Participant)*

> The participant would like a sincere apology from the religious orders. To date, their apologies haven't been sincere. '*They've just got no feeling, they don't understand what we survivors have gone through, the pain, the anguish, the torture. When they hear us, they brush us under the carpet … they need to sit down and think and really pour their hearts out*'. *(Participant)*

173. Some participants who had not had direct experience of restorative justice expressed support for the process and a belief that it would be beneficial for them. Others discussed how they had sought to directly engage with abusers via restorative justice or mediation but had been denied this option.

> The participant reported a strong desire for mediation or restorative justice processes. He explained that real healing could happen in restorative conversations with the parties involved, where they would acknowledge their responsibility for the abuse that took place. The participant noted that he would like mediation both with the abuser and with the institutions. He explained that he sought mediation or a restorative meeting with the abuser throughout the legal process, but that the abuser refused to engage in a meeting of this sort. The participant expressed his disappointment, as this would have had a greater impact on him in seeking justice. *(Participant)*

174. For others, restorative justice offered potential for the religious orders to offer genuine contrition outside formal and impersonal structures of court systems. However, for this to be achieved, it was noted by one participant that significant effort would be required.

> *'The Church/clergy need to step up the pace with the restorative justice process. Money alone cannot fix this problem, no matter how big the monetary fine is.' (Participant)*

175. A small number of participants who did not have direct experience of restorative justice discussed how the idea of this approach to seeking justice was unappealing to them.

> He does not wish to have anything to do with the [order, as] no meetings, apologies or other processes dealing directly with them would be helpful to him as a survivor. *(Participant)*
>
> Reflecting on an offer from [name of school] to participate in a conversation with priests, which appeared to be part of a restorative justice process, the participant felt that this would not be something they wanted. *'If they are looking for forgiveness, they will have to go somewhere else.' (Participant)*
>
> The participant is not in favour of restorative justice: '*That's all rubbish. It'd be like sitting down with Putin.' (Participant)*

(iv) Enhanced Mental Health and Social Supports

176. Many participants described how they have suffered with mental health issues, substance use issues, and some have experienced homelessness (see Chapter 5 and 6). To respond to the needs of the most vulnerable survivors, participants would like to see a greater number of mental health and social supports made available.

> The participant recommended a helpline for people who have been abused, which can ensure fast-tracked support for their mental health, housing, drug and alcohol use or any other issues, without having to explain their abuse again. *'You don't have to say you were sexually abused; you don't have to tell your story again.' (Participant)*

177. In order to cope with the trauma from sexual abuse that survivors have experienced, participants recommended that counselling be made freely available for survivors and their families and resourced sufficiently to ensure availability without long waiting lists. Numerous participants expressed their desire to receive mental health counselling, but cited waitlists and cost as barriers to accessibility. The Health Service Executive ('HSE') currently funds the National Counselling Service for those who have been sexually abused, and some participants said that they have encountered significant waiting lists in some areas of the country. The religious orders fund a counselling service called Towards Healing.

> Counselling when needed in the years to come should be made available within days and not have to wait months and therefore may have to be sought privately, this also should be allowed for in redress. *(Participant)*

> *'Without a shadow of a doubt, there should be some scheme or an ability for survivors to get proper therapy. That would be certainly something that I didn't see there that would actually have practical benefit. That's more important than anything else, to try to help people who got hurt.' (Participant)*

> The participant's only recommendation to the government was that they would fully fund counselling services for all people who were abused. *(Participant)*

178. While a number of participants provided positive feedback about counselling they had received from Towards Healing, an independent counselling service funded by the religious orders, some participants felt that any involvement from the religious orders was inappropriate. Some participants who had availed of this service said that their experience was that the religious order could limit the number of sessions, whereas others said that they had open access to the therapist.[8]

8 Towards Healing's current policy is that clients have access to as many sessions as they need and no information about clients is shared with the religious order, who pay for the service. Towards Healing is putting in place policies to reflect a recent court ruling on mandatory reporting of historical abuse.

179. Some participants also expressed their appreciation of services already in existence. It was also noted, however, that these services should be better advertised:

> *'I would like to ensure that Towards Healing continues. However, this needs to be much more widely advertised so people know about it.' (Participant)*
>
> *Overall, mental healthcare should be easier to access: 'There should be 10 charities like One in Four.' (Participant)*

(v) Support for Divestment of Schools

180. Some participants recommended the divestment of schools from religious orders. It was recognised that this would be a complex issue to address.

> The participant would like to see a separation between the Church and our education system. *(Participant)*
>
> The Catholic Church should be removed from running any education in Ireland. *'They are the wolf in sheep's clothing.' (Participant)*

H. Chapter Summary

181. This chapter has outlined the broad range of views that participants relayed in their interviews. Views and perspectives varied considerably, but some clear themes emerged.

182. The key issue for participants was accountability for those who had any role in sexual abuse, including those responsible for abuse and institutions or organisations who failed to respond to such abuse if it was known to them. There is support for a statutory inquiry whose findings will be public, and there is also a recognition that confidentiality and privacy is important for some survivors and would be required for those survivors to be able to be included in any future process.

183. A majority of survivors see redress as an important element of accountability, and whilst they are clear that it cannot compensate for the harm that was done, most survivors who engaged in this process viewed it as a means to achieve some symbolic accountability, particularly if it were to be funded by the religious orders.

184. Survivors have also made a range of recommendations on how the legal system should be reviewed and changed to alleviate the difficulties they described experiencing when engaging in criminal or civil proceedings. Participants sought more transparency in decisions not to prosecute alleged abusers; more expeditious processing of cases where historical sexual abuse is alleged; and providing better support for those giving evidence, including guidelines and parameters for lawyers and the justice system when dealing with survivors of sexual abuse.

185. As the age profile of survivors of sexual abuse in day and boarding schools advances, participants were in agreement that any response needs to happen as quickly as possible.

186. It is of great importance to some participants that what happened is not forgotten, and a range of important recommendations for ways and means to acknowledge the legacy of historical child sexual abuse were made. Of particular importance was the need to commemorate those who did not survive their experience of child sexual abuse and who died by suicide.

187. Participants also offered recommendations on supporting survivors, including provision of better mental health services. Some advocated for restorative justice practices involving the religious orders.

188. Of paramount importance to participants was the need to be assured that children are safe in schools today and that the systems and frameworks in place to provide this assurance are implemented effectively. For some survivors, this also means removing religious patronage from schools altogether.

189. The summary of the Survivor Engagement report in the next chapter reflects the range of views described by participants presented in this chapter in the context of their descriptions of experiences of child sexual abuse, the impact on their childhood and the effects that persisted into adulthood.

Chapter 8:
Summary of the Survivor Engagement Process

1. The report of the Survivor Engagement process is an account of what participants described happened to them. It outlines individual accounts of sexual abuse, assault and violence that are are vivid, devastating, and harrowing to read. Participants said that, as children, the immediate impact of the abuse led to isolation, shame and feelings of culpability. Many participants spoke of a culture of fear and violence in their schools which they said facilitated sexual abuse and a prevailing silence. Others described being groomed, leaving them with complex and damaged internalised feelings. Participants said that the powerful position of the Catholic Church in school and family life meant that many could not tell anyone, including parents, about what was happening.
2. The testimony of survivors who participated in the process describes how the effects of childhood sexual abuse have had a profound impact on their childhood, adolescence and adult lives. In recognising the damaging long-term effects of child sexual abuse and that the sense of powerlessness experienced by a child who has been sexually abused can last well into adulthood, the experience has been described as a 'continuum of oppression'.[1] The vast majority of survivors felt unable to tell anyone about the abuse for many years which exacerbated their difficulties, as those who can tell and get support may recover more quickly.
3. Individual participants described the differing impacts of abuse on them and how they dealt with these. Some participants described how they were outwardly successful in their careers and relationships but suffered emotional and psychological pain. Others' lives bear long scars of breakdowns, breakups and disrupted employment and careers. Participants were nearly universal in outlining personal suffering, self-doubt and psychological isolation. The accounts outlined similarities of difficult relationships, opportunities lost, and ongoing mental health challenges, counterbalanced for many by a remarkable resilience in wanting the secrets of the past to be known and a wish that children now and in the future would be safe.

1 For example, *Walsh v Byrne* [2015] IEHC 414.

4. Several participants spoke of the limitations of the legal system in dealing with cases of historical child sexual abuse, both in criminal and civil proceedings. Whilst some achieved a measure of satisfaction, most participants who had travelled this road spoke of frustration, delay, and unfortunately for many, retraumatisation due the adversarial nature of such proceedings. Those who had undertaken civil proceedings referenced the considerable financial costs involved. Other participants described efforts to engage with religious orders or schools, attempting to seek a measure of resolution through non-formal or restorative justice practices, with mixed results.
5. While participants had varied views on what should happen next, the need for accountability was a strongly recurring theme. Participants felt this could be achieved via a statutory inquiry and financial redress. They were clear that they want the religious orders to be accountable and many thought that this should include them financing a non-adversial redress process. The transparency of a statutory inquiry that can compel witnesses and documents is important, but it was also evident that participants want any process to be as survivor-centred as possible with due regard to the necessary supports for those participating. This includes the need for some survivors to be assured that their privacy can be maintained. Whilst many survivors would be willing to give evidence in public, many others felt that they could not. Despite the passage of time and professional support, some participants who spoke to the Scoping Inquiry have not revealed what happened to them, even to their own families and who, devastatingly, spoke of the burden of shame that they still carry.
6. A common wish among participants was that they wanted the public to know what happened in their schools and for their accounts to be believed. It was also important to many participants that what happened to them be recorded and remembered and there were different views on how this should happen. Many participants felt that learning from the past to protect children now and in future would be an apt way to honour their experiences, while some considered that research into a broader sociological understanding of the issue of child sexual abuse in Ireland was required.
7. It is important to say that many of the participants who engaged in the Survivor Engagement process spoke eloquently about how they managed the impact of their childhood trauma. In doing so they credited support from spouses and partners, other family members, friends, other survivors and professionals. Others said the impact of their childhood trauma remains with them and continues to shadow their lives.

8. The Survivor Engagement team would like to express our deepest appreciation to all of those who brought their stories and experiences to the Scoping Inquiry. The team has worked hard to reflect their voices and views with respect and integrity. It has been a privilege to hear those stories and the team sincerely hopes to have done justice to what participants told the Scoping Inquiry.

Email: survivorengagement@esi.gov.ie

Telephone: +353 (0)906 483610

Post: Scoping Inquiry, c/o Department of Education,
Marlborough Street, Dublin 1