

# IICSA: Two Years On Insights from Child Sexual Abuse victims and survivors ..... *In our time*

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and the IICSA Changemakers

IICSA  
**changemakers**



Taking action. Creating change.  
Preventing child sexual abuse.

# Introduction

The final report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse was released in October 2022.

Since that time further consultation has taken place but the delivery of the ethos and required actions behind the 20 recommendations of the final report have not yet been realised.

Critical to the original inquiry was the expertise and testimony of victims and survivors. IICSA Changemakers have continued that focus by working with victims and survivors in policy and service delivery for the prevention of and response to child sexual abuse.

This document mirrors the September 2024 IICSA Changemaker event where survivors demonstrated the importance of the required action needed to tackle child sexual abuse. Highlighting to delegates that the abuse they suffered is as alive today as it was when it happened to them. They ask that action is taken in their lifetime ensuring we all do better for victims and survivors now.

This booklet has taken the direction of the final report and it's recommendations and themed them into six areas of focus where victims and survivors demonstrate that the path to action and change is both clear and achievable. The supportive quotes are from both the Truth Project, who were part of the original inquiry, and members of the IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community.

- ❖ Communication and understanding
- ❖ Child sexual abuse online
- ❖ Legislation and Government
- ❖ Improved processes
- ❖ Redress
- ❖ Support

# Communication and understanding

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

1. A single set of core data relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation
4. A public awareness campaign on child sexual abuse

For the second year running, police forces in England and Wales recorded over 100,000 child sexual abuse offences last year, with an increase of 2% in 2022/23 to 105,286.

That figure describes the cases where a victim or survivor reported through the justice system. The suspected figure of the totality of child sexual abuse per year is conservatively estimated by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) at over 500,000 cases. We need to understand the full scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse so it can be responded to in the most effective way and prevented. We can't do this unless the public is equipped with the right awareness and professionals have the right support to be able to spot the signs of abuse. It is imperative we improve our public and professional understanding of child sexual abuse as a whole.

Any campaign to increase awareness must alert professionals to the different needs of victims and survivors such as neurodiversity, disability, those from a seldom heard communities or those less able to verbalise their experiences.

The more our society can work together in being aware of abuse, feeling confident to spot the signs and report when something isn't right, the more victims and survivors will be responded to and supported in an appropriate way.

“I feel very strongly that the issue of child sexual abuse and the potential risks to children need a higher profile. There should be a greater understanding that abuse occurs within all classes, cultures and ethnicities. Public campaigns to raise awareness of the issue, and age-appropriate sex education about grooming and sexual abuse, could help to protect children.”

*Esther, The Truth Project*

“I didn’t always know the words for what was happening to me.”

*Kevin, The Truth Project*

“It is essential that we have clear and concise language around child sexual abuse. I am tired of society and authority positions being afraid of talking openly about this. I’m tired of having to accommodate other people’s discomfort around what has happened to me and other survivors (whether they’ve disclosed or not). I’m tired of it falling to survivors to have to be the ones to do the heavy lifting and shout from the rooftops about this.”

*Ella, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“This intentional destruction of the victim and the intentional protection of the perpetrator exists in many communities and for this very reason many never disclose the child sexual abuse they have had to endure.”

*Aunee, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

# Child sexual abuse online

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

12. Mandatory online pre-screening for sexual images of children for all regulated providers of search services and user-to-user services

20. More robust age-verification requirements for the use of online platforms and services

The Online Safety Act was a step forward for a safer internet experience for all users but the regulation work that is now with Ofcom is crucial to ensure its delivery. Safeguarding by design, with focus on platforms and big tech companies taking ownership, will be instrumental in turning the tide of risk that remains open on the internet.

An evidence review recently published by IICSA Changemaker member the NSPCC focused on children's exposure to online sexual risks and the role technology plays in furthering or reducing these risks. Drawing from studies in the UK and internationally, it provides an up-to-date assessment of online child sexual abuse. Chapter three of this review focuses on the varied approaches and impacts of the sexual nature of harms committed against children and young people online. The evidence base, although underdeveloped in this respect, suggests that children are more likely to block contacts when they are concerned about sexual solicitation by adults, than to use reporting functions on platforms or seek help offline. This is concerning as it reduces the opportunity to engage with a child or young person and offer appropriate support based on the harm that has been caused.

Consistent and robust risk mitigation and management is required to deliver strong governance around illegal content. Regulatory compliance is consistently required in decision-making at the very top of organisations to deliver true accountability approaches. This can be supported by the targeted use of enforcement powers, including that which enables a senior manager to be held liable for compliance with a confirmation decision.

It is also important that the Codes of Practice set out how they will identify a child's account from an adult's account. The NSPCC highlights that private messaging is the frontline of online grooming. Data from ONS shows that 74% of approaches to children by someone they do not know online first take place via private messaging.

A focus of the IICSA final report was prevention and focus on perpetrators. It is vital that further measures are added in the future which directly target perpetrator activity.

"After online sexual abuse I was isolated and struggled to make friends at school. I behaved differently, drinking, smoking and talking loudly about sexual activities, but none of the staff asked if I was ok. I spoke to different GPs about feeling suicidal, but they prescribed medication and said my behaviour was due to 'teenage moods and depression'."

*Alyssa, The Truth Project*

"Content that is illegal to own on DVD and Blue-Ray is prevalent and even mainstream online. This content includes sexualising children, depictions of incest, and content which shows overt sexual violence towards women, including rape, gagging, and strangulation. Age assurance alone is not a silver bullet and in order to truly prioritise child safety, all online platforms need to be safe by design."

*Megan, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

"We have a responsibility to do better, to ensure that every child is safe, and that victims and survivors are not continually revictimized and retraumatized by the evidence of their abuse being forever circulated."

*Rhiannon, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

# Legislation and Government

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

3. The creation of a cabinet Minister for Children

14. Compliance with the Victims Code.

16. A national guarantee from the UK and Welsh Gov to provide fully funded specialist therapeutic support for child victims of sexual abuse.

13. Mandatory reporting, requiring individuals such as police officers, any person in a position of trust, and any person working in regulated activity in relation to children, to report allegations of child sexual abuse to the relevant authorities, with failing to report when required to do so becoming a criminal offence. This includes where a disclosure of child sexual abuse is received, where a person witnesses a child being sexually abused, or where other recognised indicators of child sexual abuse are observed

Survivors deserve someone at the table in the cabinet office that is solely focused on the endemic that is child sexual abuse. Someone with oversight of the connecting areas across Government that has the power and opportunity to take the action needed.

When a child engages with the criminal justice system after they have experienced abuse or harm, they are met with not only a complex and intimidating process, but also extremely distressing delays in the justice system as waiting times for child sexual abuse cases continue to increase. Data collected by the NSPCC from the Ministry of Justice shows a record high for children waiting for court dates after abuse. With the average number of days between a defendant in child sexual abuse cases in England and Wales being charged and the criminal trial starting, increasing by 55% in a five-year period from 273 days in 2017/18 to 423 days in 2022/23.

For a child who is already experiencing depression, suicidal thoughts or PTSD as a consequence of sexual abuse, the drawn-out process of waiting

for a trial to start ,let alone come to completion, can be extremely distressing.

IICSA Changemakers supported the work of the Children's Coalition on the Victim and Prisoners' Act to ensure measures were introduced to hold the justice system to account and aid transparency with respect to the treatment of all victims and survivors. Compliance with the Victim's Code is essential so that all victims and survivors who engage with the criminal justice system receive a service focused on their needs and feel confident they will be listened to and supported.

The first right of the Victim's Code *'to be able to understand and to be understood'* is imperative to restoring confidence in the justice system. This levelling of information is key to ensure no further imbalances of power occur. For a victim or survivor to understand the system, they first need to be aware of their rights and how to exercise them. The onus should be on professionals, not victims and survivors, to inform and deliver these rights and entitlements.

When IICSA Changemakers worked with their Survivor Advisor Community only 50% had heard of the Victim Code of Practice, 25% knew where to find information on the code and no one thought they knew about all 12 rights in the code.

Much focus has been placed on conversations around the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse. It's important to remember that mandatory reporting was not offered as a standalone recommendation by IICSA. IICSA Changemakers believe that for any implementation of mandatory reporting to have a positive effect, a wider system change for child protection where both capacity and capability of that system needs to occur.

Effective and timely reporting is a vital part of a well-functioning child protection system. That said, mandatory reporting on its own is not a panacea for improving the prevention of, reported rates, considered response and care of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.



A successful introduction of any proposed mandatory reporting duty will require careful consideration in both design and delivery to improve the identification and response to child sexual abuse.

If the aim of a mandatory reporting duty is to improve the protection and support offered to children and young people experiencing child sexual abuse, there needs to be a commitment to the following areas:

- ❖ No further harm to children and young people by systems that are supposed to ensure their safety and well-being.
- ❖ Greater research exploring the barriers children experience and the facilitators that help them to disclose.
- ❖ Good quality training with the safety of the child at its core across all organisations, institutions, agencies and individuals to be able to respond to child sexual abuse in a trauma informed way.
- ❖ Avoiding important unintended consequences, including the risk of silencing victims and survivors through fear of authorities/repercussions.
- ❖ Listening to children and young people, and adult survivors, and responding adequately.
- ❖ It is part of an improved multi-agency system response, where respective accountabilities are clear.

The first step in any reporting system needs to be appropriate access to support. If a child discloses, or an adult suspects that a child is being abused, the child must be given immediate access to age-appropriate, specific and sufficient support. This is routinely not available for children and especially those from seldom heard communities such as those that experience inequality which can be due to a range of factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or migrant status.

The CSA Centre commissioned research into the perspectives of professionals working with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds<sup>1</sup> who have experienced sexual abuse to explore the needs of

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<sup>1</sup> Ali, N, Butt, J and Phillips, M. (2021) Improving responses to the sexual abuse of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children. Barking: Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse.

children, the extent to which these are being met and how professional responses could be improved.

Drawing on their reflections, the study identified internal and external barriers for disclosing child sexual abuse and accessing support services as well as a broader lack of cultural understanding by statutory agencies and service providers. These included perceptions of cultured gender roles, concepts of honour and shame, a lack of trust in services, the impact of poverty and fragile immigration status to confronting racism and unconscious bias.

“We are further neglecting our children by not making the detail to professionals and the community alike really clear and simple on how we should report child sexual abuse.”

*Andy, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“Fully funded specialist therapeutic support for child victims of Child sexual abuse. That was all I wanted when I was 15. But there was nowhere I could get it.”

*Sheanna, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“We need representation at the very top, to ensure the focus and resource needed to both prevent and respond better to child sexual abuse, is delivered. Someone who can uplift the thousands of survivor voices out there so that all Government departments hear and respond.”

*David, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“Our justice system has the power to heal, but it also has the potential to inflict further harm. We must acknowledge the flaws and work collectively to address them.”

*Poppy, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

# Improved processes

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

1. A single set of core data relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation (Also covered in the communication section)
17. A code of practice for access to records pertaining to child sexual abuse, with records to be kept for 75 years
7. The registration of care staff in residential care
9. Extended use of the barred list of people unsuitable for work with children
10. Improved compliance with statutory duties to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service about individuals who may pose a risk of harm to children
11. Extending the disclosure regime to those working with children overseas

Recently there has been an enhanced focus on violence against women and girls (VAWG), yet the perception of this area leans towards victims and survivors as adults only. The reality is that all children are at significant risk of harm from child sexual abuse which is one of the biggest threats within this area of criminality.

The NPCC (National Police Chief's Council) has declared that VAWG is at a level of national emergency. The response to this must be systematic change to deliver improvement to existing processes.

“The court experience deeply affected me’. A BSL interpreter was provided when I gave evidence, but not for the rest of the proceedings, so I could not follow the rest of the long trial, not even when the verdict was delivered. When I saw my mother in tears I thought Mr Smith had been found not guilty, until I realised she was crying out of relief.”

*Aeson, The Truth Project*

“The long delay in proceedings was partly due to the lack of disabled access in courtrooms. I had to travel long distances, use back entrances to buildings due to accessibility issues, and sometimes wait in rooms that were unsuitable but were the only ones I could enter due to my medical condition.”

*Shannon, The Truth Project*

“As Morton grew older, he was placed in a number of children’s homes. He knows from his files that he was sent to almost 20 different institutions. He experienced physical and sexual abuse by staff and other boys and says he can only remember one home where he wasn’t abused in some way.”

*Morton, The Truth Project*

“The excuse of too many agencies using different software systems or having different policies needs to end. Lets work together from the outset so that children don’t fall between systems.”

*Sarah, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

# Redress

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

15. The removal of the three-year limitation period for personal injury claims brought by victims and survivors, and the express protection of the right to a fair trial, with the burden falling on defendants to show that a fair trial is not possible. These changes will only apply to victims and survivors themselves, and not their estates

18. Further changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority scheme to make it fairer and more accessible to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse

19. National redress scheme for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation in England and Wales

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) conducted research to understand what outcomes are important to victims and survivors who have experienced sexual abuse. As part of this they found that the concept of justice meant significantly different things to different people and was not a universally interpreted term. We need to acknowledge this by moving the metrics we test and record to those areas that people really want to see and would value movement in.

Any system of redress needs to ensure equality for all survivors, and it is vital that we remember IICSA describes redress in numerous areas – not just financial. For example, the IICSA recommendation called for the following:

- ❖ a written apology acknowledging what has happened,
- ❖ providing an acceptance of responsibility which significantly aids recovery for victims and survivors,
- ❖ a meeting with a senior representative to have questions explored,
- ❖ and access to counselling or therapeutic support as well as payment compensation in accordance with the terms of the scheme.

It is important the Government looks at the whole redress package - as recommended by IICSA – and does not solely focus on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.

IICSA Changemakers agree that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme should be amended so that the eligibility criteria bring non-contact offences with equivalent effect within scope of the scheme. We also support amending the definition of a 'crime of violence' to include other forms of child sexual abuse, including online-facilitated sexual abuse.

Organisations involved in child sexual abuse cases have and do continue to state that abuse is regrettable therefore there should be no difficulty in establishing an apology, where appropriate.

We know the power that this acknowledgement and offer of an apology can have for survivors. Therefore, it is only right that we do all we can to facilitate this element of justice for survivors of child sexual abuse. This would be best supported through primary legislation.

Sexual violence in general and non-recent abuse in particular can be hard to prove in criminal law but civil law can present a remaining option. It will be key to focus on ensuring the language of this area is as appropriate as can be for victims and survivors. For example, using complainants instead of claimants takes out the emphasis on a financial element. This again is important for the cultural change needed to support and empower victims and survivors to seek meaningful outcomes for them.

“I did not receive any support after the court case. I applied for compensation and did receive an award, but the process was unsympathetic, chaotic and very drawn out. More support is needed to be available to victims and survivors during court cases and after.”

*Lorraine, The Truth Project*

“Justice is not just criminal, it’s personal, we have to feel it and see it.”

*Anonymous, IICSA Changemaker Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“I attempted to seek some redress through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) and found this process extremely stressful, obstructive and difficult. The CICA process is ‘completely inappropriate’ for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. I have been struggling with it for two years and have ‘spent hundreds on paperwork’ and feel that the struggle is keeping me in the past and feeling abused.”

*Robert, The Truth Project*

“The path to justice for survivors of sexual abuse is fraught with challenges; systemic failures, victim-blaming language and inadequate support. But change is possible. We need a justice system that prioritises victims, not perpetrators and that isn’t solely focused on traditional recordable justice outcomes.”

*Laura, IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“We shouldn’t have to fight so hard for justice”

*Denise, IICSA Changemakers Survivor Participation Manager*

# Support

IICSA Recommendations in this area:

**16. A national guarantee from the UK and Welsh Gov to provide fully funded specialist therapeutic support for child victims of sexual abuse.**

Children are more likely than adults to be the victims of sexual offences. They are the victims in 40% of all sexual offences – including rape and sexual assault – yet make up just 20% of the population in England & Wales. Despite this, recent research by the Children’s Commissioner for England found that, in 92% of cases, child victims of sexual abuse victims received no support from an advocacy service.

Victims and survivors, and often statutory agencies themselves, rely on third sector to provide support services. The CSA Centre identified that 468 services supporting children and adults affected by sexual abuse exist across England and Wales<sup>2</sup>. Of these, four-fifths were in the not-for-profit sector and in each region, the CSA Centre estimated that there were between 10,000 and 20,000 victims and survivors for every service providing support.

These organisations are already underfunded and unsupported to deliver the bespoke, essential support needed for the totality of victims and survivors. We need to understand that a justice outcome is not the only outcome survivors might want or need, and that support designed for survivors individual needs can be an essential element of recovery.



“d/Deaf victims and survivors need to have a counsellor who is d/Deaf or can sign fluently and understands about d/Deaf culture, language and traits.”

*Leonie, The Truth Project*

“It becomes the sole responsibility of the victim and survivor to recognize they need support. An added layer and burden put upon us, in a position where those who share their experiences are often met with a wall of silence, anger and disbelief”

*Elizabeth, IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“Support does not come without better communication, education, mandatory reporting, and public information campaigns. It shouldn’t be for a child to communicate that they are not ok to trigger getting the support that is so much needed.”

*Bryony, IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community Member*

“You need to understand that half a century later, the pain and nightmares don’t go away over time. They multiply. You have to ensure the therapeutic support for adult survivors is available. The correct support and treatment.”

*Joe, IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community Member*

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<sup>2</sup> Parkinson, D. and Steele, M. (2024) [Support Matters: The Landscape of Child Sexual Abuse Support Services in England and Wales](#). Barkingside: Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse.

## To conclude

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse are calling for commitment and action in equal measure to better safeguard and provide better support to children and adults who have been a victim or witness to child sexual abuse. An overhaul of the current system where children and young people are truly placed at the centre of our justice system is much needed and long overdue.

In October 2022, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse outlined recommendations that would help prevent, recognise, and address child sexual abuse. To date, little action has been taken to deliver the ambitions of those recommendations.

This Government has an opportunity to set out a strong trajectory to tackle child sexual abuse and support victims and survivors. As IICSA Changemakers, we are ready to work with the new Government on how we can prevent child sexual abuse and offer a sufficient response when it is discovered.

### A note from the chair of IICSA Changemakers

*The work, expertise and energy of the Survivor Advisory Community for the IICSA Changemakers has created a road map for decision makers to follow in combating child sexual abuse. Not only have they described the elements of policy and service that need to be taken up so clearly, but they have rooted those actions for all of us by sharing their personal experiences. We remain committed to change and offer the Advisory Community and all survivors that have contributed to the independent inquiry and its subsequent implementation work our gratitude.*

*“For all those times  
You think you won  
Of lives destroyed  
We will stand strong  
United in power  
Together as one*

*For all these times  
We will say no.”*

By Elizabeth Shane ©  
Member of the IICSA Changemakers Survivor Advisory Community

