



One in Four

Survivors' Voices

Breaking the silence
on living with the
impact of child sexual
abuse in the family
environment

One in Four would like to thank all the participants in The Survivors' Narratives Project for their willingness to give their time to write about their difficult experiences so that others may understand more clearly the personal impact of sexual abuse in childhood, and the complexities within the family environment.

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Prelude



When paedophiles say to their victims, as they all do in one form or another, “If you ever speak about this, unimaginably bad things will happen to you,” what they are doing is perhaps on one level even worse than the physical act of abuse itself. They are manipulating their victims into being complicit in the abuse.

Forcing the victim to take responsibility for protecting the abuser means that every time you smile, shake hands, speak with and act normally in front of the abuser – as you must, because he is your teacher, father, uncle or priest – you become a little bit more complicit. It is the most toxic form of manipulation possible. And in addition to making it pretty much impossible to trust in any kind of safe reality forevermore, that ingrained and very real fear – that if you speak out, then the world will end – takes hold at a cellular level and rarely, if ever, leaves.

I was raped over a relentless, never-ending five years as a pre-pubescent boy by a gym teacher at my school. He was very, very good at ensuring my silence; so good in fact, that it took me 25 years to first speak about it.

Being heard, being met with belief, understanding and compassion, feeling safe from judgement, criticism and blame – these things are the absolute key to rebuilding trust and starting the healing process. Feeling able to come forward and speak out safely has never been more vital for those who, like me, have had the trauma of child rape thrown onto them and, by proxy, those who love them.

We can, and need, to do better at bearing witness to the unspeakable.

James Rhodes

Musician
Author of *Instrumental*

“ Feeling able to come forward and speak out safely has never been more vital for those who, like me, have had the trauma of child rape thrown onto them and, by proxy, those who love them

Foreword



This is an important and brave account. Important because, through the stories of survivors, it brings into sharp relief the cruel reality of childhood sexual abuse – the betrayal, terror, isolation, loneliness, destruction of childhood and family that are all part of the fallout of being abused.

Brave because it takes great courage to speak out. So much of the power of the abuser rests with the silencing of the child – a silencing that can go on for decades. One of the most shocking features of these accounts is that in fact so many of the victim/survivors did manage to tell someone when they were still being victimised, and invariably their reality was denied.

They were shut up – both by the abuser and by the denial and complicity of those around them who should have been there to protect them. They were frequently failed by mothers, social workers, teachers, the police, doctors – the very people charged with their care and protection. The result of this shutting up was an emotional shutting down where the child victim knew that there was no escape, they would not be believed, they gave up on any hope of the abuser being stopped. They were returned to the terrifying violation, feeling even more alone.

It is awful to contemplate the agony of children in such circumstances. Sadly, while these accounts are not contemporary, the veil of silence and denial remains. Approximately 50,000 children in England have a child protection plan. Only 5% of these have a plan on the grounds of sexual abuse. This is despite the fact that research from Finkelhor et al (2009) demonstrates that a child who is physically assaulted is six times as likely as other children to be sexually abused; similarly any child suffering neglect is much more likely to also have been a victim of sexual abuse. So the vast majority of children with child protection plans have a plan on the grounds of neglect, with physical abuse the second highest category and yet no one inquires about or investigates the likelihood of sexual abuse as well. I call this denial.

There is a recurring theme in this report that the burden of telling or ‘disclosure’ is placed firmly on the child. Too often, in my investigations into child sexual abuse and exploitation in my role as Deputy Children’s Commissioner for England, I encountered professionals who would say: “We know this child has been abused but until they volunteer an account, there is nothing we can do about it.”

It is time to stop this nonsense. Placing the burden of rescue on the child is unacceptable. The voices in this excellent report tell us what needs to be done today. It is the least the survivors deserve – that their stories are heard, the lessons are learnt and their brave accounts are not in vain. I commend **One in Four** for this excellent report.

Sue Berelowitz

Visiting Professor
Bedfordshire University

“ The voices in this excellent report tell us what needs to be done today. It is the least the survivors deserve – that their stories are heard, the lessons are learnt and their brave accounts are not in vain

Introduction

One in Four is a charity that is passionately and professionally committed to supporting people who have survived child sexual abuse (CSA) and to raising awareness of this challenging issue. We are a hands-on organisation run by a small group of staff and volunteers with a growing team of dedicated, specialist counsellors and experts. A number of the people working at the charity are survivors themselves.

With this report we have given survivors a voice, enabling them to tell us about the long-term impact of sexual abuse in childhood on their lives. And to say what helped them survive. Too often they have been silenced. CSA is still a terrible taboo, so we appreciate this may not be an easy read for you. But it is incredibly important we change public perceptions to help prevent this happening to children now and in the future, and to support and help heal those who are daily dealing with their survival. The accounts you read here are similar to the experiences of many of the clients we see at **One in Four**.

We want to present the human face of the long-term impact of CSA and highlight the many commonalities that survivors experience, but also provide a rigorous and factual document founded on academic research and analysis of the underlying data. Expert adviser and **One in Four** Trustee, Christiane Sanderson, who has been instrumental in leading the academic and educational side of our work for lay and professional audiences, has written a detailed analysis of these narratives of sexual abuse in the family environment.

We used the image of an octopus for this project because it represents the manipulative, secretive nature of sexual abuse which dwells in the dark, and for the cunning nature of abusers who, like the octopus, often pull a veil over others, confusing and distorting reality. This report looks at survivors' experiences of CSA in the family environment, but like the octopus with its eight tentacles, sexual abuse happens in many contexts, which we aim to cover in future publications.

I would especially like to thank all of those who contributed their narratives. I know how hard this will have been, but it is only by seeing the devastating results of CSA that we can help others understand and act. To find out more about **One in Four** please visit our website at www.oneinfour.org.uk

Linda Dominguez

Director
One in Four

“ With this report we are giving survivors a voice, enabling them to tell us about the long-term impact of sexual abuse in childhood on their lives. And to say what helped them survive

Executive summary

***Survivors' Voices* breaks the silence about the impact of child sexual abuse (CSA) committed within the family. Through first-hand accounts, the report illustrates the effects suffered by people who were sexually abused as children by those they should have been able to trust.**

Families should be environments of safety for the love and nurturing that is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. But with CSA they become places of secrecy and fear, wherein children's view of themselves and others becomes distorted, inevitably impacting the adults they become.

The report, prepared by the charity **One in Four**, shows that CSA inside the family is a serious but poorly understood problem in our society. Because of the stigma, shame and fear, most survivors remain silent about their experiences. It is estimated that 70% of sexual abuse takes place within the family, yet few of these cases ever come to the attention of the authorities.

The *Survivors' Voices* report demonstrates how sexual abuse in childhood can be associated with long-term health conditions such as eating disorders, self-harm, addiction to alcohol or drugs, and mental illnesses including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Because CSA is often undiagnosed as an underlying cause, survivors rarely receive the most appropriate management for these conditions.

There is also a significant cost to society because many survivors end up in the criminal justice system, mainly through the misuse of alcohol and drugs. Again this cost could be reduced through better diagnosis and treatment of CSA.

This report is intended for policy-makers, healthcare professionals and social workers to help them understand, from the survivors themselves, what it means to have been sexually abused as children by a relative or close family friend.

By understanding the problem, we now have an unparalleled opportunity to address it. We must make the most of this opportunity – not just for the sake of survivors, but also for society at large.

Key findings

- The burden of disclosure is on the survivor, as child or adult. Disclosure in families was frequently met with disbelief or ignored, sometimes leading to the abuse continuing and the survivor feeling further betrayed. In adulthood some survivors cut family contact to heal, inevitably leading to other loss
- Many survivors showed their distress in childhood through challenging behaviour – becoming aggressive or withdrawn, stealing, taking drugs, failing in school – and were seen as bad
- CSA can impact on educational and vocational attainment, reducing life chances
- Survivors commonly experienced trauma including post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, mental health problems, depression, anxiety disorders including OCD, addictions, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal behaviour or, and challenges with intimate relationships, trust and a damaged sense of self
- Survivors often experienced multiple attempts to get appropriate help. When the link to the underlying cause is made and appropriate interventions given, healthy post-traumatic growth is possible
- Survivors reported the positive impact of being heard, and understood by professionals who had the specialist skills to work with CSA.

Key recommendations

- Improve awareness and training of health-related professionals to help them manage CSA by recognising it as an underlying factor in many in conditions such as substance abuse, eating disorders, mental illness, and domestic violence
- Encourage health professionals working in areas such as drug and alcohol dependency, mental health and eating disorders to ask their clients if they have a history of trauma such as CSA, so they can be offered appropriate treatment including referral to specialist sexual abuse agencies, such as **One in Four**
- Improve referral pathways for survivors to ensure they are directed to specialist agencies
- Provide additional funding so survivors can access support even if they lack the necessary financial resources
- Involve survivors and survivor organisations in the training of professionals and development of support services.

Because of the stigma, shame and fear most survivors remain silent about their experiences. It is estimated that 70% of sexual abuse takes place within the family, yet few of these cases ever come to the attention of the authorities

The Survivors' Narratives Project

One in Four created The Survivors' Narratives Project in 2015 to give survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) a voice and a chance to be heard.

Through publication of survivors' narratives in this *Survivors' Voices* report we aim to raise awareness and improve understanding of the impact of sexual abuse in childhood across professional audiences including health professionals, social workers, counsellors, educators, lawyers, policy-makers and the wider public.

One in Four offered survivors the opportunity to write about the impact the sexual abuse they experienced in childhood had on their lives. We asked them to tell us what happened after they were abused: what bearing it had on their lives; what had and what hadn't helped them; and what support and changes they wanted to see for other survivors. As the majority of the clients we see at **One in Four** were sexually abused in the family environment, for the pilot phase of the project we focused on these survivors. Recent research indicates approximately 70% of survivors report being sexually abused in the family or extended family.¹

These narratives are intended to bring a personal, intimate face to the harsh reality of CSA. They aim to give an insight into the events – some catastrophic – that can occur following the trauma of being sexually abused, and to show the creative, sometimes damaging ways survivors managed themselves. Many want their experiences to be acknowledged and used to create positive change for other.

We encourage professionals and policy-makers to develop a greater understanding of the impact of abuse, and to provide enhanced support for survivors, including recognising the life-course impact that sexual abuse in childhood can have on an individual's health and wellbeing. We invite funders to support initiatives that bring greater awareness of the impact of child sexual abuse, and also support activities that limit the personal and societal impact. We hope these narratives will give encouragement to others on their healing journey and inform the wider public why the impact of CSA in adulthood matters.

Sexual abuse is not just about the sexual act. Without support, for some it can become a life sentence.

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Why this is necessary

CSA is a major public health issue. Yet, just as the act of sexual abuse is hidden and shrouded in secrecy, so too is the longer-term impact, which is often obscured or unrecorded in clinical or statistical data.

A child who experiences sexual abuse is a child who experiences trauma, which can have long-term effects and present in different ways. Whilst the understanding and management of trauma has advanced, the recording of sexual abuse as the underlying cause, where relevant, often lags behind. There are many reasons for this; it is a complex area. The protective mechanism of dissociation can lead to memories being repressed or split off beyond conscious awareness, only to surface many years later. Disclosure of sexual abuse can be challenging because of the intense personal shame survivors experience, and the trauma of abuse creates chaotic internal dynamics, often obscuring the cause.

Depending on the age a child is abused, the severity of the abuse, relationship to the abuser, the impact of first disclosure and other developmental issues, survivors can experience a range of resulting effects including mental health issues, depression, anxiety, complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), borderline personality disorder and dissociative personality disorder. Many survivors become drug and alcohol users, some develop addictions or eating disorders, some engage in self-harm to manage and regulate emotional pain associated with their abuse. Some enter abusive relationships in their adult lives and can be subjected to domestic violence. We hear from our clients that many attendees at twelve-step programme meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous have experienced sexual abuse. Sometimes addictions or behavioural issues, such as unregulated anger, lead to criminality. Ministry of Justice research shows almost 30% of prisoners report experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse in childhood.²

The full economic and social cost of CSA remains unknown. It is estimated each adult rape costs £96,000 in its emotional and physical impact on the victim's lost economic output due to convalescence, treatment costs to health services and costs incurred in the criminal justice system.³ The overall cost to society of sexual offences in 2003-04 was estimated at £8.5 billion,⁴ but this did not include long-term health impacts such as PTSD or mental health costs

which, given the prevalence and broad range of impacts, are likely to be far higher.

CSA is often not recognised as a possible underlying trauma behind health related issues. The cost of ignoring CSA means some survivors not getting the treatment they need and becoming heavy service users in different parts of the mental health system, whilst the underlying trauma is not diagnosed or addressed.

Since 2012 there has been a significant surge in awareness of sexual abuse as increasing numbers of survivors have come forward for help. Whilst there is a growing recognition of CSA, it continues to be hard for survivors to speak out publicly. It remains more socially acceptable to identify a person as having addiction issues than to acknowledge them as a victim of sexual abuse, thus perpetuating the culture of silence and the burden of shame on those who experienced it.

How we did it

Between March and July 2015, **One in Four** offered survivors the chance to participate. We informed survivors via leaflets in the public spaces at **One in Four**, through communications with former clients and via other counsellors specialising in working with survivors. To encourage male survivors to participate we invited a male-only survivor organisation to promote the project.

We used the definition of abuse within the family context from the Office of the Children's Commissioner:

'Child sexual abuse perpetrated by a family member or that takes place within a family context or environment, whether or not by a family member.'¹⁵

We interpreted sexual abuse in the family environment as being forced or persuaded to take part or be involved in sexual activities under the age of 18, by a family member and/or persons connected to the family, including parents, step-parents, boyfriend or girlfriend of parents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, family friends, babysitters etc.

Thirty-six people registered interest and each was offered a telephone conversation to discuss their participation. Of those, some were outside the criteria and others indicated they wanted to participate but, in the end, were unable to write.

Many participants had completed or were in the late stages of counselling. Some had participated in psycho-education groups run by

One in Four or other agencies. All were offered access to support from counsellors at **One in Four** if the writing process was unsettling and if they no longer had counselling.

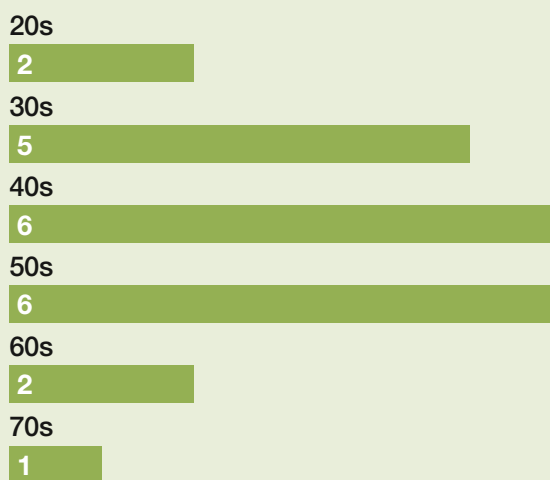
Participants were either offered a place at an introductory writing workshop, or given basic writing guidance with prompt questions developed in consultation with **One in Four** counsellors. Eleven people attended one of three workshops, a few requested a private meeting to talk about their writing or to dictate their piece. Many wrote without further contact.

The introductory writing workshops provided an opportunity for survivors to come together with a shared purpose. For some, this was the first time they had experienced being with other survivors, itself a powerful experience. The workshop evaluation indicated the importance of the shared experience and how highly participants valued the opportunity to communicate about their experiences.

Who contributed

Twenty-three people submitted narratives, although one later withdrew. The majority (20) of the submissions were by women, two by men. Most participants were white including White British and White European. Thirteen percent of the participants were Asian British and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Caribbean backgrounds.

The age range of participants was from 27 to 71, as follows:



Participants self-selected to take part in this project and are not a representative cross sample of survivors. Many of the participants have managed in their working lives to a certain extent, whilst carrying the wounds of abuse. Some clients seen at **One in Four** are unable to work, or they work part-time due to the extent of the impact of abuse in their lives.

Since 2012 there has been a significant surge in awareness of sexual abuse as increasing numbers of survivors have come forward for help. Whilst there is a growing recognition of sexual abuse, it continues to be hard for survivors to speak out publicly

Who abused them

The focus of the narratives was on the impact of sexual abuse on survivors' lives, not on the events of the abuse. However, when writing, some mentioned the relationship to their abuser. The abusers included fathers, step-fathers, uncles, grandfathers, step-grandfathers, brothers, step-brothers, brothers-in-law, close family friends, babysitters and mothers. Six said they experienced sexual abuse from more than one person, in some cases the subsequent abuse was outside the family environment. One mentions being abused by a minor.

Disclosure and reporting

As the focus of writing was on impact, whether survivors had disclosed or reported was not a requirement for participation. People who had reported and were still engaged with that process were excluded.

A few survivors mentioned they attempted to disclose as children, one in a care home, but no action was taken; a couple recalled mentioning it in school, and the subsequent teacher or social worker visits to their home compounded the situation and silenced them further. Some recollected telling their mothers and their experiences were often denied, making their isolation and distress worse. For many, the death of their abuser prompted their first disclosure if they felt safe enough to speak out.

Of the 22 participants who submitted narratives we learnt three had proceeded to prosecution, only one of which was successful. Although one survivor disclosed to the police as a child, pressure from the family to withdraw the statement prior to trial led to the trial proceeding with no evidence offered, resulting in a 'not guilty'

verdict. It was only when the survivor attempted to report their abuse again as an adult that they discovered this and the double jeopardy rule barred any further action. Another who reported heard no case was tried in their country of origin.

Notes on editing and analysis

Participants were not selected for their ability to write, rather for their willingness to write about their experiences. Although some participants were supported to clarify their pieces, including grammar, spelling and punctuation, the writings are the survivors' own voices. Most chose to be anonymous and took a pen-name. Each piece is very different. Some participants wrote in the first person, some in the third, some chose to write to their abusers, others to a wider audience. Every piece expresses the individual experience and any opinions expressed are not necessarily the views of **One in Four**.

The narratives which follow are very powerful, shocking, profound and distressing – each shining a light into the dark world of CSA, illustrating how as children they could not tell or were not heard, and showing their resilience in adulthood to make sense of and overcome their experiences. A selection of the narratives have been included in this report, with others published in a supplement available at **www.oneinfour.org.uk**

All the narratives have been analysed by expert in CSA, Christiane Sanderson, for themes of impact on the survivor, their families and the professional responses. This analysis highlights the lived experience of survivors of CSA in the family environment and includes recommendations, from survivors themselves. This can be found at the back of the report.

Many of the participants have managed in their working lives to a certain extent, whilst carrying the wounds of abuse. Some clients seen at One in Four are unable to work, or work part-time due to the impact of abuse in their lives

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Survivors' voices

Amy FEMALE

The abuse happened for three years of my life but its impact has shaped every day of my existence, and will continue to do so until the day I die.

I was abused by my uncle from when I was six until about nine years old, without even knowing that it was abuse. This has had many consequences, physical, emotional, psychological, and behavioural and it took me over 20 years to make sense of the abuse and to heal my wounds. The abuse was disguised by love, affection and secrecy. It took many therapists, personal development workshops and finally a friend to help me realise that what happened to me was not right and that it never should have happened. It took courage to tell my family, to disclose, to name the abuse and take ownership of my life, my sexuality, my body, my emotions. I felt used, abused, confused, and finally I became free. Free to be myself, without shame, guilt or secrets; secrets that I had been carrying all my life. Physical illnesses I had to suffer (at age 30, I was diagnosed with an unexplained chronic genital illness), emotional turmoil, identity loss, always pleasing others and only getting love and acceptance from giving. Giving while feeling empty within.

The abuse forced me to lie, to lie to others but most importantly to lie to myself. To pretend nothing wrong was happening. To pretend it was all part of being a good girl. It was all part of being loved and accepted. How many years have I been carrying this burden and sometimes I still am? I need to keep reminding myself of my patterns of self-harm and destruction, of self-sabotage.

The inner struggle of not being understood, of not understanding myself, of having to suffer more sexual abuse as a teenager because that was all I knew. That was how I got love and affection, so I ended up repeating the patterns unconsciously.

I felt weird for many years; I felt like I was a bad person because I wasn't like anyone else. I started stealing to align myself with the feeling of being bad. Trying anything possible to not be a good girl because being a good girl meant giving in to the disgusting desires of this messed up man. He would love me, kiss me, touch me and

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tell me how wonderful I was as long as I met his sick sexual needs. I started stealing from sweet shops and moved onto stealing money from my parents to be able to buy sweets and later drugs.

Drug abuse: the only thing that would make me feel good temporarily. I started smoking and drinking at 13 and continued to smoke cannabis daily since age 14. By the time I was 15 I was taking amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD and then moved on to ketamine and cocaine as well until I finally stopped at age 21. I saw many of my friends have psychotic episodes and some of them being hospitalised. I started training to be a counsellor at age 19 and through going for weekly counselling and writing personal development journals for my course, I was able to understand myself and find inner resources to stop taking drugs.



The turning point for me was when I gained insight about how I was using drugs to numb the pain. At that point, I had been raving and living in squats for two years. Once I understood why I was using drugs, I had to make a decision on whether to continue using drugs to numb the pain and follow my friends' path, or be brave and stop using drugs and change my life. It wasn't easy but I left my then boyfriend, left behind most of my friends and continued with my self-healing and training to be a counsellor.

I hate this man and, sometimes, I resent my whole family for pretending it never happened. For pretending he is just a sick man. He was the abuser and I was the victim but somehow he always ends up being the victim. They say: "He had a difficult childhood himself" and people always feel sorry for him. My hatred comes from the loneliness and fear, the emptiness and sorrow that I had to live with because of what he did to me.

I escaped from that agony by coming to London alone aged 17. Years of counselling and other survivor friends helped me make sense of the abuse. I now love myself, I do. However, my identity struggles continue, my need to comprehend and heal continues. I still find myself looking for the answer and solution to fill in this emptiness that even today cannot be calmed with food, cigarettes, meditation or acceptance. Now that I love and accept myself the emptiness I feel is getting smaller because it is being filled with self-love, peace, understanding and acceptance.

I would like to mention in my personal experience, that the impact of the abuse comes and goes. I was in denial for many years. I had flashbacks at one point, I tried to tell myself that other survivors had to endure worst than me and that what happened to me wasn't so bad. Accepting that it was bad, that it did affect me was the beginning of my healing journey.

I would like to encourage all survivors to go for therapy and speak to other survivors about their experiences. It is still a taboo subject that it is not spoken about openly but I have met many men and women who have been abused and who are still fighting to make sense of, understand and heal from their traumatic experiences. I think understanding that it wasn't my fault was the key to getting confident and being able to deal with the trauma. Understanding that I was only a child and an adult should never have taken advantage of a child who was starving for affection and love.

Julie FEMALE

From a young age to my early teens, I was sexually abused within the family home by my dad and grandad.

For some reason I became the family scapegoat. Perhaps because I was the youngest, less able to stand up for myself, or because my abusers had complete control and power within the family home to behave how they liked. It was not in their interest to empower me. I was there to be used by them. As an adult, I now know that an abused child is always singled out and groomed with equal measures of kindness and then cruelty. They took any sense of stability I may have felt, replacing it with fear and anxiety. I was totally at their mercy. Every photograph of me during this period of time shows an unsmiling, sad-looking little girl. Once I told my mum something my abuser had said to me. She was giving me a bath at the time, I was probably around four or five. She responded with such anger, slapping my legs uncontrollably! Shouting: "Don't you ever say anything like that ever again!" My legs were red and sore but what hurt the most was her reaction. Whatever her reasons were, I knew from that point on I really was on my own, so in order to survive I split off from my reality.

Having no voice or power gave me an overwhelming sense of anger as I could not protect myself or expect care from an emotionally absent mother. Therefore splitting off or disassociating from my reality became a coping mechanism in a situation too awful to comprehend. Another way of coping was trying to forget.

I have spent most of my life trying to forget what happened to me. Even when flashbacks arrived, I pushed them down so far that they were in the tips of my toes. I wanted to be normal, to be normal like my abusers pretended to be normal. Like nothing had happened, like they had never done those awful things to me; to pretend that they were really loving, kind, respectful, religious family men like they pretended to be to the outside world. Unfortunately their hypocrisy and lies were never judged by another adult, just silent, watchful me – with no power or words to make it stop or to make it fair – so I pretended too. But unfortunately, if you don't deal with these issues they find a way of seeping out, without

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you even being aware. For me this happened in the way I felt about myself and in relation to the people around me.

I have always felt not good enough. Not just self-esteem issues that the average person can also struggle with, but a real, bone-crushing devastation in feeling below everyone. Because of the way I was treated, I felt I did not deserve basic human rights. If the people that were supposed to nurture you as a child, sexually abused you, then surely you are unlovable, unworthy and deserve bad things to happen? I am nothing therefore I deserve nothing. As I walked through life feeling like this I had no way of protecting myself emotionally against people who would want to manipulate or hurt me for their own gains. Then if I was treated badly I would not stand up for myself and would try to get away from any conflict. Of course I was angry, but I did not know how to express or channel that anger in a healthy way to protect myself!

As an abused child, pushing the anger down, just like the memories, forms part of your survival pack where you tune out or try to eliminate feelings completely – stay in the fog. What is the point of being angry about what is happening to you or that you are suffering a great injustice? I knew this at the age of four. You then carry these feelings along with you but where does that anger go? Sometimes it erupts for inappropriate reasons or sometimes you drink it away, take drugs or punish yourself with emotionless sex. This anger that I carried for so many years, that very nearly saw me off, was the very emotion that helped to set me free because dealing with your anger is about facing what has happened to you.

You have to face the fog. This fog is built on Fear, Obligation and Guilt. The abusers' keys to your prison. The fear is not knowing when or where your abuser will pounce on you or how they might threaten you. My abuser used and built on my sense of obligation: on being told how you are being looked after and loved, you are obliged to do things that they want you to do. The guilt is the worst because it's mixed with shame too. I always felt guilty because I knew what they did to me was morally wrong so I carried their shame. Therefore, to set yourself free, you have to unpack these dense emotions. This is not easy as they have become embedded in your sense of self, so you have to feel that anger of injustice, in order to illuminate your needs and not stay in the fog. To focus on your needs and become your own authority – reclaim your human rights.

I have been receiving counselling now for nearly two years. When I first arrived at One in Four I was practically on my knees! I was having a breakdown as I couldn't go to work or function normally. Once the counselling began, I went on a long journey of self-discovery. Yes there was real pain, but slowly this developed into my recovery. I feel my parents trained me to deny my feelings so it was like reclaiming the right to feel and express myself. One in Four gives you tools to help you deal with age-old patterns, helps you to connect to the real you, the one that was hidden. You remove all masks and view the world as yourself – totally equal, self-knowing, with empathy for yourself. My abusers are now dead so I cannot seek legal recompense but I have rewarded myself through my own recovery.

I had to tell my children as I was acting so differently and didn't want them to think it was something to do with them. It was the best thing I could have done, obviously, I didn't go into too much detail, just enough for them to understand. To the best of my ability I give them a happy, nurturing home environment because even though I may not have had one, I certainly know what one is. My husband already knew from bits of information I have given him over the years. He is such a supportive, kind, caring man who loves me no matter what. I often think how clever I was choosing a man who loved me rather than denying myself that right too. While I was recovering, I told certain friends but I'm always careful not to over share, because I do not have to have my experience authenticated by anyone.

Childhood sexual abuse is the ultimate betrayal, as the very people that are supposed to love, nurture and care for you are the ones who place you in a living nightmare. I have a strong, powerful voice now that can say how awfully my family behaved towards me. That simple statement has taken me a long time to say, but it's freed me. My recovery has changed everything for me. I feel happier than I ever have. Of course I have sad days, especially when you see images of caring families, but I know it's me mourning for the childhood I didn't have, and I have high hopes for my future.

The statistic for childhood sexual abuse is one in four so there are many of us. Counselling works, this is a simple fact and with specialists like One in Four, many adults living with the pain of childhood sexual abuse can be helped so they can have the life they were supposed to have.

Elizabeth FEMALE

8 years old

I waited for what seemed to be a lifetime for the footsteps to fade and the silence to fall. I was finally alone. My heart beating and my face red-hot I crept from my bunk bed to the wardrobe where we kept our old, battered tape recorder. I knelt on the floor and hands shaking I held down the record button. "Dear God, please look after my sisters and my brother and my mummy and my nanna and granddad too... please forgive me when I am naughty." The next sentence caught in my throat and I choked out: "...and please can you stop Mike sexing me." I prayed every single night to be saved from the abusive grips of my abuser. But God didn't save me that night, he still crept into my room and took what he wanted, my innocence, my precious child-like naivety.

12 years old

Four years later another normal day at school. Only this one was going to be different. My closest friend at school told me she was being abused by her uncle and he was going to prison. A feeling overwhelmed me and I said: "That's happening to me too." So I was told I needed to tell a teacher, naively believing that it would just stop. I was so afraid of my mum finding out and told them so. By the end of that fateful day the police were informed, including my mother, and we were removed from our home and taken to a women's refuge for protection.

13 years old

The court case was imminent and Mike was charged with indecent assault, attempted rape and GBH. The next thing that happened ripped my heart out. A family member took me aside and said: "Do you know what you're doing to the family, do you know what will happen to Mike if you do this – don't do this to the family." I didn't want to cause the family any more pain so I told the police I was lying.

20 years old

I woke up on a Monday morning in summer time... another morning with a hangover – life had become one big groundhog day. I couldn't take this any more. I wanted to take my own life. I grabbed my box of antidepressants I was prescribed and stuffed them into my mouth.

“ My family took me aside and said: “Do you know what you’re doing to the family, do you know what will happen to Mike if you do this – don’t do this to the family”

Choking them down, I swallowed the entire two boxes. I started to sob uncontrollably: "How had my life come to this?" Then it came, a moment of clarity: "What the hell was I doing?" I picked up my phone, hands shaking, and dialled 999. I didn't want to die. An ambulance arrived and drove me to hospital. I was so desperate and wanted to be sectioned, but no such luck.

When I was released I decided to approach the police again. They solemnly told me that there was nothing they could do. My self-destruct button was well and truly set to destroy.

30 years old

Five a.m. on a Sunday morning I looked out of the window at the first warm glow of the sun's life-giving rays, beautiful warm reds and golden yellows etched across the horizon... for me another dawn to hell. I had been drinking neat vodka constantly for seven days and didn't show any signs of stopping, heart broken, mouth dry and a head aching and a throat so raw from the countless times I had vomited. Not just from the alcohol but from bulimia ripping through me with a vengeance, binging and purging for days. My hands were cut and black and purple bruises covered my body from passing out. I hated myself and wanted to die. Death seemed like the kindest option for me now and it didn't feel far off. I had hit rock bottom and it hurt like hell. I didn't welcome in the day... I welcomed in oblivion.

31 years old 11 months 8 days sober

The day after the event in June when I had a complete break down, I collapsed into rehab. I admitted I am an alcoholic, I suffer from bulimia and complex PTSD as a result of the abuse I suffered for over seven years of my childhood, sexually abused almost every day. As a child I didn't know what was happening to me and I didn't know it was wrong. I was told by my abuser, that he did what he did because he loved me too much and didn't know how to show me. It wasn't just sexual abuse, he was violent, emotionally abusive, neglectful and a bully.

I am now working a twelve-step programme of recovery to combat my addiction issues, which also have led me to make very unhealthy choices sexually and with my relationships with men. My sexual behaviour had become more and more risky towards the end of my drinking party, I believe, to live more on the edge and dangerously due to my addiction, but also as a direct result of the sexual behaviour I was witness to and experienced as a young girl.

I continue to have weekly counselling with a specialist CSA agency and addiction therapy. Through working my recovery I have started to come to terms with my past and to stop it from governing my future any more. I am beginning to build a relationship with my family, something I never ever thought would happen. I also help others now from my experiences.

I have started to do things to enrich my life, one being singing as I now have a self-worth I never learnt. I am a survivor of sexual abuse and today I am proud to say this. It has made me who I am.

“What he did to me affected my whole life, every relationship, my personal identity and the general trajectory of my life's path. Childhood sexual abuse manifested in all aspects of my life

Jayne

FEMALE

In my anxiety I still sleep with my hand positioned in a protective hold in an attempt to keep my privates safe for fear of an intruder, scared someone will enter uninvited: my subconscious still attempts to protect my modesty.

What he did to me affected my whole life, every relationship, my personal identity and the general trajectory of my life's path. Childhood sexual abuse manifested in all aspects of my life. The first two relationships it besmirched were the most important ones: the relationship to and perception of myself; and my relationship with my mother. I hated myself; I felt a level of shame that I could only be in the world if I wore a mask. I pretended to be confident and became a people pleaser. I despised myself for allowing, tolerating and colluding in the lies and deceit to protect this family member who sexually abused my body and betrayed my trust.

I wasn't able to concentrate at school. Teachers said: "She gets distracted easily" but I was disassociating in order to manage my thoughts and the images of the abuse. I used to think of a bowl of sick. This might sound weird but it was my way of putting it all into one; it was easier that way. Distancing was my only defence, in the moment and thereafter. The teachers who suggested that I go sit in the library and read were helpful as I was able to escape my reality in books and enhance my reading and knowledge of the world. My behaviour as a child was considered as being 'bad', so I was told I was bad, which was easy for me to accept because I had all this other evidence in my mind to support the claim; essentially I knew I was bad. I was trapped on the inside of my life, I was helpless and nobody knew my suffering.

I was so sick of being interpreted as 'bad' that my anger took charge. I became aggressive outwardly and inwardly. I was a tortured soul so took drugs and went into school hoping someone would figure it out, but I was expelled. I ran away from home, which only led to being taken into care. When I was there I did disclose the sexual abuse although nothing was done about the perpetrator. Trying to commit suicide didn't work. Nothing I did attended to the gaping

wound of my childhood sexual interference. I became a victim who masqueraded as a tough, feisty tomboy.

I was trapped in two emotional worlds; that of anger and of shame. I was furious that I had been wronged and I was disgusted with who I was. Any attempts I made to speak about my feelings were quashed; any cries to be noticed were silenced. I was left alone with my shame and humiliated for anything I said about my feelings. I was and still am hyper-vigilant, which can lead to my misunderstanding a situation.

So how did I start to heal? How did I make it this far in becoming a therapist? Little by little, I worked with a long list of therapists who each helped me manage a bit. I would start with them, do some work, then find that I couldn't go any more, or just notice I had stopped going and feel guilty for not saying goodbye. Some of the social workers who cared for me were skilled enough to reach me; they were congruent in their approach; they gained my trust by being transparent and totally accepting of who I was. I was the girl that always ran away but the girl who needed most of all to stop running.

I felt abandoned in life and it took me many years to realise that I may well have been abandoned by key people in my life but I never really understood the consequences of the fact; that I became really good at abandoning myself. An example of this was losing myself in drugs; taking numerous cocktails of ecstasy, cocaine, acid and amphetamines was my 'normal' weekend, partying, leaving myself vulnerable to those that took advantage of the fact that I froze as soon as I was touched and I would disassociate in sexual encounters of any kind. I continued the abuse, not only by allowing my vulnerable self to be in danger, but with my internal dialogue, as what I told myself amounted to my lack of self esteem and worthlessness. I was convinced that this was my fate and that I had deserved everything I got, I had for some reason been so 'bad' that my punishment was to live this life of perpetual abuse. I confronted my abuser when he repeated the abuse in my late teens; he said he thought that I wanted it!

I met a stranger the other day outside my house in the street. He told me he raises awareness of child abuse by making films and is a committed activist. We discussed the dogs we were walking, then he told me he had been abused as a child. I felt so much freedom in being able to say: "Me too!" His transparency was helpful because I didn't need to hide the part of me that

most needs not to hide. It was truly liberating and often is in the company of survivors, knowing you are not alone. As we said goodbye and walked away from each other he called back to me and said: "Well done." I gave him my puzzled face and he then said: "You know what I mean." The penny dropped; he was congratulating me on becoming a butterfly against all odds. I cried a few tears of joy as I went to work that day because I had been seen.

My healing process is informed through this part of my journey. Writing this has been excruciatingly difficult, raising the memories of the sexual acts carried out, seeing his face in my dreams and fighting him, having to work hard to care for myself and remind myself that the feelings that have re-emerged, are the feelings that I have previously worked through and I don't need to feel them as an adult. It's worth feeling the pain in this way if it gives people a clearer idea of a real life that has been broken by childhood abuse. My reparation includes this piece of writing, although I will not name him here as it would be fruitless to name a dead man. I value myself as the survivor – exposure for my closure.

“ I was convinced that this was my fate and that I had deserved everything I got, I had for some reason been so 'bad' that my punishment was to live this life of perpetual abuse





Steve MALE

Raped and abused by an uncle, four episodes between approximate age of five to ten. The nature of the abuse was forceful, violent, terrifying, occasionally life-threatening, marked by sudden changes of behaviour and anger. I had no memories of it at all until the age of 46.

The dissociated years were marked by depression, anxiety, withdrawal, distrust, paranoia, jealousy, cynicism, under-achievement (school, college, career, earnings), a strong tendency to avoid all-male company leading to difficulty bonding with bosses and allies. I suffered poor health from hyper-immunity and anxiety disorders, asthma, eczema, allergies, and the effects of sleep loss, exacerbated by the physical conditions and the drugs given to treat them.

My adolescence was lost to withdrawal and depression, the belief that good things happened to other people, and to feeling as attractive as 'sheep shit'. Late compared to peers, I had a few girlfriends, but was sexually naive and passive and too gentle to give climax. In terms of emotion there was a hard limit on how deep in love I would or could go. I was horrified by the risk of fatherhood, firmly believing the world needed no more like me, and I would not wish that on a child.

Later, I pursued dangerous activities: rock and ice climbing, winter mountaineering, sports motorbikes. Several hospital visits and many near-misses were part death-wish, part seeking a feeling of aliveness to pierce the fug of depression. Throughout, I had tendencies to self-sabotage, sending away most of the good stuff that came my way.

My early 40s saw an improved emotional state, moderation of dangerous sports, more friends and confidants, some deepening of relationships, leading to marriage, a sabbatical and 10 months travelling.

Revelation came suddenly while travelling, relaxing on a coral island. First, strong misplaced up-wellings of emotion, huge sadness, followed by remembered words and phrases, crystal clear in the voice, accent and manner of the abuser.

These were followed by still images, then video clip memories. Sometimes the body moved involuntarily into the positions during abuse, then strong pain came. Then mental impressions of the proceedings of the rape came.

The main phase of remembering took two months, the snippets forming into four episodes at different ages. Each new revelation can take two to three weeks to remember following a pattern comprising: disturbed or thrashy sleep, volatile emotions, absence of mind, shifting body pains and shifting of 'the furniture being moved around'. Terror can manifest early as a feeling of never finishing a pee, frequent toilet visits and a feeling of wetness, lasting up to a week. Something other than you is using the brain, analogous to a computer responding slowly when other programs are running. Feelings of vulnerability, dread and distress. Continued employment was only possible with formal involvement of occupational health and informal patience. My wife endured feelings of helplessness at witnessing distress, the tension of unpredictable good and bad days.

Recovery has progressed with one-to-one counselling from Survivors UK (via the Rape

“ My adolescence was lost to withdrawal and depression, the belief that good things happened to other people, and to feeling as attractive as 'sheep shit' ”

Crisis website) and **One in Four**. I did not fare well with a style of counselling where the client is left to fill the silence while being closely observed – I experienced too much dread of attending, and this affected me days before sessions. It was also becoming plain to me that counselling would not be brief and that to continue in employment I would need evening or weekend sessions. I benefited from a warmer, more coaching style in an atmosphere of safety that deep exploration was possible, without re-traumatising or dread. Continuing more deeply, old core beliefs and effects on my personality were revealed. I was astonished at the depth and profoundness of my surrender, abandonment and depression at the age of five, at the completeness of the human psyche at that age, and at the level of damage that is possible.

Examples of deep discoveries include: the schism between being loved and safeguarded then being tortured, terrified and taught that kids are vermin and are disposable; the breakdown in trust when loving parents smiling handed me to and received me from the abusing uncle; the decision that I was a lone species, someone who would never be a grown-up; anger contained at such great pressure that it cannot be used; avoidance of fatherhood being avoidance of being near to powerless precious creatures, a nearness which would have illuminated the wrongness of my abuse too strongly to bear; paralysis from core belief that using my voice brings retribution, escalation or humiliation; a default coping strategy of passive suffering.

Group sessions have proved important – deep trust and care for others is established quickly, which somehow transmutes into improved care of self. All experiences of others have some releasing or reassuring effect for me and enabled comparison of dissociated and conscious lives, filling in gaps such as family issues and common sensitivities. Seeing others improve over time was encouraging magic.

Professional literature on abuse includes psychic activation or hypersensitivity. From reading this literature I discovered that I have always used my ‘aura as radar’: I am extremely sensitive to my environment. This contributes to my ineffectiveness or paralysis near angry people and to feeling scattered, debilitated. I have found psychic training an essential part of gaining control over the quality of my life. Meditation and energy management skills have contributed to the success of conventional counselling. These skills have speeded my

“ Due to this specialist support for childhood sexual abuse I am a success story, transformed. My abilities are unleashed, my sexuality is far less hindered, my quality of life is coming under my control

development of self-awareness, self-love, self-care and core strength. Several of my group said news of my ‘radar’ was important for them, as they realised something similar was happening for them.

One group member was nearing her court date as witness for the prosecution, which got me thinking, who would I want in the courtroom to support me? Certainly not my parents or my wife, they ought be spared the gory details, their presence would inhibit me. The best support I can imagine would be my group. I would volunteer for a survivor support group including court public gallery duties.

One in Four services have proved very effective and vital for me: one-to-one and group counselling, advice on reporting, police and legal systems and the offer of support through this process. Their survivor handbook has a section on PTSD, which helped me understand how I came to be the way I was, as has reading the work of Peter Levine on trauma. However 100% of my group report very poor experiences disclosing to their families, both in the immediate and the long term, which has heavy impact on healing and on the quality of life, so improvements here would improve outcomes. My own parents shrink from the news and try to protect their world. I have some sympathy with this and the disappointment has made me more solid and independent – as if an elastic band connecting me to my childhood has snapped, at last, and I am free to be an adult.

I have worked very hard to understand and defuse the power that abuse has had on my life, to unravel strands of personality – the innate and the effected, so as to not be defined by abuse. However I don’t know when the next dissociated memory will surface, what my personality and life would have been like, how many kids I might have had, etc. I am sensitive to news about celebrity abuses and identify strongly with the victims. So how can I claim not to be defined by abuse?

Due to this specialist support for childhood sexual abuse I am a success story, transformed. My abilities are unleashed, my sexuality is far less hindered, my quality of life is coming under my control. My professional life is stronger than at any time in the past, though this comes at an age where opportunities are diminishing. My physical health has blossomed as the weight of dissociated trauma is lifted. I am eternally grateful.

“ I perfected the art of looking happy and internalised the abuse and kept all the difficult feelings inside. For large parts of my life I hated myself, wished I was dead, wished I had never been born

Dolores FEMALE

What happened as a result of the abuse

Having grown up with several paedophiles (male and female) in the close family, I thought sexual contact of various natures with family members was normal. I was strongly conditioned not to talk about it though and also wasn't allowed to display any of the tell-tale signs of abuse, like putting on or losing weight or even looking sad. Therefore I perfected the art of looking happy and internalised the abuse and kept all the difficult feelings inside. For large parts of my life I hated myself, wished I was dead, wished I had never been born, felt guilty as if I deserved the abuse and simply thought I just wasn't good enough.

Disclosing the abuse

Even though I was very scared of my abusers and had been repeatedly threatened not to tell anyone, there was an occasion when I was even more scared of what my abusers would do to me next and I plucked up the courage to tell my primary school teacher. Sadly she didn't quite believe me and informed my parents of my accusations; they obviously denied everything and I was later severely punished. By the time the social worker came to follow up on the concern raised by the school, nothing in the world could have made me speak up again.

The next time I told was several years later as a teenager, at another point where the abuse was taking on another dimension. I literally went to confession in my local church in the hope of getting some moral backup that what was happening to me was wrong. The priest however said I had sinned and broken one of the Ten Commandments by not honouring my parents and I had to atone.

Several years later I told my boyfriend who tried to help me, but I was still living at home and did not feel strong enough to fully admit even to myself what was really going on there. I did report some of my abusers to the police in my 30s, but the case was not tried in court and therefore I have not received any legal justice or compensation.

Short-term impact of the abuse

I had learnt to lie to myself and everybody else about how I was feeling and what was

happening to me. I had also repressed many of the memories of the abuse and instead had large memory gaps.

My mental state was mostly somewhere between severely depressed and even catatonic, with an almost constant undercurrent of suicidality. By the time I married and had my first child in my mid-20s, I suffered from constant anxiety, panic attacks, migraines, agoraphobia, insomnia and anger issues. This quite obviously impacted greatly on my marriage and the way I cared for my children.

Long-term impact of the abuse

The long-term impact is that I am now in my forties and even though I have had extensive therapy and various other kinds of help, I am still struggling to form a well-functioning intimate relationship with a man. I also still have anxiety and anger issues and some depression, although to a much lesser degree.

Many years ago I left the country where I was born and grew up, and eventually stopped all contact with family members. I did this so that I would have some chance to think clearly enough, (without on-going manipulation by my abusers), and understand what had happened to me, and also to protect my own children. My own memories and judgement had been distorted so many times growing up, that I was no longer able to trust myself around them to not simply do whatever they told me to. Effectively, I have put myself into exile in the UK.

What has helped me

What has helped me enormously was attending self-help groups, long-term one-to-one counselling, reiki, homeopathy, herbalism, reflexology, shamanic healing, yoga, meditation, tantra and most of all my beautiful children and my amazing friends.

I am also now a fully qualified counsellor, and the counselling training itself has been very beneficial for me.

The group sessions at Contact (a self-help group in SE London that sadly closed due to lack of funding) helped me understand that I am not alone and that I am not the guilty party. The counselling and workshops at One in Four have helped me accept that my recovery is a life-long journey. The most important quality I have received is empathy and knowing that my counsellors had chosen to work with childhood sexual abuse.

Lara FEMALE

Dear Uncle

It may have only been eight years since you died, but I think about you a lot; all that you did and everything you gave me. Even when I go to new places, my body can feel you there with me and I can often smell you. Cigars and spearmint will always belong to you! I used to be so pleased you were in MY family: always so friendly and welcoming, always the first to play bat and ball with us or tell us good jokes.

But now I realise, you didn't fulfil the role of an 'uncle'; instead you took on many other jobs. Uncle, the magician – so good at deceiving, pulling the wool over people's eyes and changing my life from a carefree and happy one to a heinous, horrid one in a split second. Uncle the teacher; only you got it wrong and taught me things I didn't want to know, things that are definitely not on life's syllabus. Uncle the burglar; so stealthy, so secretive. You stole my childhood, some of my adulthood, and my relationship with my family. You stole my self-worth, my self-belief and my inner peace. And in their place, you've left me with rage, pain and confusion. With an eating disorder, with flashbacks and sleepless nights. With self-sabotaging behaviours, with a sense of loss, and an identity that, however hard I try, makes me feel 'different' to everyone else. You have also left me with a deep, unfathomable pool of regret. Regret that I let you get away with it for so long, that I blamed myself and took on your punishment and your shame. Regret that I waited until you died to speak out.

That day I told my parents was the worst of my life. Worse than the abuse, than the nights spent crying alone, and worse than the suicidal days I've endured. I didn't choose to be abused and to go through what I did, but in deciding to tell my family, I was choosing to 'put them through' the ordeal too. Did that make me just as malicious and selfish as you?

I didn't want to tell anyone – for it was my little secret – but it was too big for me to handle, too powerful and too much. And when I told my parents, it was the same for them too. You broke me, and upon seeing the look in my father's eyes, I realised I had broken him too. He retracted, stayed late at work, and I knew even being around me was hard. For every time he looked at me he was presented with guilt, with shame and with pain. He wanted to be there for

me, to take some of my pain but he didn't know how. He became distant and formal. He blamed himself and I blamed myself. But we should have blamed you.

On the surface of it all, my mother was 'fine' and she just 'got on with things,' like nothing had changed. Fresh air, a strong cup of tea, not thinking about it and keeping busy was her approach – and she was sticking to it. But deep down, she too was lost. Being so helpless was the worst part. What could she do? The dreaded deed had already been done. She blamed herself and I blamed myself. But we should have blamed you. Had I wanted them to react like that? No. But what had I expected? What did I want?

Looking back now, I realise in situations that we don't know how to deal with, our body and mind are smart, and they find ways to 'cope'. In the same way that I had denied, minimised, trivialised and repressed the truth about your behaviour for years, my parents too were 'surviving'. You don't choose how to survive, you just do it in the only way you know how to, and no one should have to apologise for how they choose to survive. There was no manual out there for them to 'look up' the answers, nobody they felt they could talk to about it, because of their shame, and no quick fix.

Slowly, over time, things slipped back to 'normal'. I stopped telling them how I was feeling and started to cover things up again: it was easier to 'put on my mask' and pretend I

“ You stole my childhood, some of my adulthood, and my relationship with my family. You stole my self-worth, my self-belief and my inner peace. And in their place, you've left me with rage, pain and confusion



was fine than face things head on. I'd had some counselling – and I wanted my parents to see me as 'normal'. Being a people-pleaser, I wanted them to think I was strong, capable and 'fixed'. And so, because I was pretending nothing had happened, so too did my parents. They didn't talk about it because it meant nothing, but because it meant everything.

Five years later, and after a lot of ups and downs, I broke down, I crumbled and I cracked beyond repair. Everything and everyone became too much and I was scared of my thoughts, my self and what I was capable of doing. So I turned again – begrudgingly – to my parents. I feared they would think me weak, that I should have dealt with this by now. But my parents were better than anything I could have imagined. Having had time to process what I had told them five years earlier, they were receptive, empathetic and supportive. They were no longer 'surviving' but were strong enough to live with it. In letting them in, showing them my weaknesses and telling them how I felt – they listened, supported and loved me unconditionally.

Don't get me wrong; it's not perfect and we are still on a journey – and whilst they might not be there yet, they are one day closer than they were yesterday. They just might! My dad is often still lost for words, my mother still says the 'wrong thing' a lot of the time and drags me out for walks and strong cups of tea that I don't want! But something has changed. I now realise that they will never understand why I am like I am, they probably won't ever be able to identify with how I feel – but they will do all that they can to help. I no longer feel alone in this, and none of us blame ourselves anymore; we blame you, Uncle. We can't start over, but we can begin now.

Telling my parents was one of the worst things I had to do at the time, but in hindsight it was also one of my saving graces. I know I am extremely lucky to have parents who have the capacity and determination to support me through this. There are times when nothing and nobody can help, times when I feel so low I don't get out of bed, and days when the war with myself claims ground, but as my boyfriend once said to me: "You couldn't imagine you would be here six months ago, so think where you could be in another six months." It's true. It's funny how letting people in has helped me get out of the hell you imprisoned me in. Not all family members are created equal.

Yours, never.

“ Many years later, I was at university and I was starting to experience flashbacks rather than just nightmares and I was very dissociated, confused between past and present

Taylor FEMALE

If I had one word to describe myself I would say lucky. I am lucky to still be alive; lucky to have met the right people, lucky that the abuse I suffered was so all consuming, that any sense of self remained dormant until I got to safety aged 28.

I then saw various counsellors and therapists until one therapist was able to offer me reparative open-ended therapy, twice a week for up to four hours a session over a period of 10 years. I needed so much time in a session to even feel safe and once I started talking about one incident of many I would dissociate so badly it took a couple of hours to recover enough to be able to go home. I think of that therapist now as my primary caregiver, who provided that special attachment we all need to develop. A close female family member physically and sexually abused me from as early as I can remember right up to when I cut contact in my 20s. I was also shown how to sniff glue when I was six years old.

At school, I tried to speak out to a teacher, and that made the situation at home worse. Over a period of several weeks afterwards my abuser physically abused me with a bat she used for 'dunking' the washing. She hit my back and hit and kicked my head, leaving me unconscious. Each time I came round, I'd check, can I still see, can I still stand? As a result of these beatings, I had speech and language difficulties. I finally sought help for this 25 years later, and was able to make some progress, but I still find language slow and exhausting.

Many years later, I was at university and I was starting to experience flashbacks rather than just nightmares and I was very dissociated, confused between past and present. When I told a good friend about the abuse, she found it overwhelming and didn't speak to me again for many months. I found it very difficult because she was the first person who had tried to get to know me. My mind crashed, and I barely made it through my finals, I had intense anxiety and suicidal thoughts. One night driving back round the M25, I came to, driving at 90 miles an hour towards a gap in the crash barriers where I knew there was a big enough drop on the

other side. I heard a voice in my head, which I recognised as one of my music teachers, saying: "Go home and get help." I drove home, in a cold sweat, very slowly, repeating over and over again: "I know, I know." I believe I was acknowledging the abuse to myself for the first time. I started going to the college counsellor, who then referred me on to the Minster Centre for long-term therapy. I made a vow that if one person had made a commitment to help me then I would do all I could to stay alive until the next time I saw them.

Two years later I asked a social worker who I knew socially where I could get group therapy and she told me about One in Four. Although private therapy had been useful, I had still not been able to talk about the abuse, as I never felt safe enough. I was even unsure it was incest because I had been told by a teacher that this only happens between a father and a daughter. Luckily Colm O’Gorman who founded One in Four, and set up the group I attended, put me right about that. I remember him saying "The buck stops here," in order to break the cycle of abuse. That was 15 years ago. In that time, I have told people and they have been supportive. I have also told people, such as a previous teacher and they have not been able to hear my story. I have learnt painfully that sexual abuse by a female is still a taboo subject.

At one point, I became homeless and moved into a hostel, where I had to get my windows nailed shut because I was sleep walking onto the balcony. I saw a psychiatrist, who prescribed antidepressants. I then told her I was fine and so avoided any further diagnosis. However, I did finally seek help for solvent and alcohol abuse from AA and Alcohol Recovery Project. I had been drinking to the point of oblivion regularly since the age of 18, suffering blackouts and hallucinations. A few times, I had 'cold turkeyed' and gone through the shakes without medication. I had also been sniffing daily, anything from deodorant, glue, wood preserver, turps, floor cleaner. Occasionally, I 'snorted' washing powder or set light to plastic objects to really get wasted.

Luckily I got the message from friends and teachers that I needed to stop and get help and that this would take a long time. I spent relentless years re-telling endless memories of abuse, each one painful and bleak, causing me to panic and shake uncontrollably. Days lost in dissociation and nights of terror, where I would repeat to myself: "It's over, it's over, it's OK, it's over." Throughout that time, I clung to the belief

that one day I will get to the end of this. And then one day about a year ago, I emerged into the present. I could now be my adult self, in control of my own life. Something I had seen others have at 18.

I am now able to work part-time and am studying a course in counselling skills. I know people I can talk to, and I like to run, play badminton, paint and play music. My proudest achievement is learning to cook and being able to look after myself. I probably think about an aspect of the abuse every day, but now I can hold this in my mind without dissociating. Others may view my life as a half-life but I am deeply in touch with what it is to be alive and what is important to me.

My advice to anyone seeking help for childhood sexual abuse is to get help from people who really understand. Seek out people who can be with you while you talk, and trust yourself to find your way through. Do what you need to do; if you need a teddy, then go to the toy store, or charity shop if you are broke. Oh and get the number of the Samaritans on your phone, for when the bleak times come around.

There needs to be more awareness around the damage caused by childhood sexual abuse, particularly abuse within the family. Survivors need more access to specialist help and support.



“ My proudest achievement is learning to cook and being able to look after myself. I probably think about an aspect of the abuse every day, but now I can hold this in my mind without dissociating

Anon FEMALE

So, you need to have some sense of me. The key points to convey are: I am Asian (born and brought up in Britain in a male-dominant socially conservative family of Pakistani Muslim origin); and I was sexually abused by my older brother (aged 18) during the 1970s, around the age of four to seven.

As a child, I didn't understand I was being sexually abused. I just knew I didn't like it, didn't want it, that it was a secret and it was wrong. I had a strong sense of that. Nothing was ever spoken, I somehow knew it within myself. In my head I reasoned what was happening was normal, this is what brothers did to their sisters, only it wasn't talked about. I retreated into myself, and became very shy about socialising with other kids, as if they somehow knew there was something wrong with me, or would find out.

As a result of the abuse I felt ashamed, dirty and disgusting. I could not express my feelings because my language, thoughts, emotions and mind were still forming. I wanted the abuse to remain hidden. To reveal it would be to acknowledge it. It was easy to pretend it wasn't happening and for most of the time, it didn't feature. I was scared about the repercussions of the truth being revealed, i.e. being taken into care and causing trouble for the family (as if things weren't hard enough already). I did not want to be openly associated with sexual abuse and still don't really... who would?

I remember the relief and amazement when the abuse finally stopped when I was seven. I thought because the actual physical abuse had stopped, it was over, done and dusted. I didn't forget about it – I just didn't think about it, after all I couldn't change it, so why choose to remember something painful and punish myself further? I couldn't deal with it mentally or emotionally... that would come later in life, with unprocessed feelings such as anger.


The effects of what happened have stayed with me, un-dealt with and unprocessed, throughout my life. The damage from my early years has coloured everything else at all stages of my

life. I know it sounds dramatic but 'I'm just telling it like it is'. It amazes me – the amount of psychological and emotional damage that is the result of around half a dozen instances of sexual abuse.

I want to point out it's not just the abuse itself that damages, it's the in-between bits, the powerlessness to deter it from occurring, not knowing when it will happen next and what it will entail, what will he do next? How far will he go? Whether it will get worse? Will other men start doing this to me? This is psychological trauma at a young age when your brain is still being formed.

I was living on a knife-edge, not knowing when my world was next going to be turned upside down. I felt tainted and believed others could somehow spot I was deformed/defiled in some way. I felt unnatural, unclean. Not a good way for a little girl to feel. Not great for confidence and self-esteem.

When the abuse was occurring, I 'zoned out'. I was very young, my brain was still developing. So, as an adult, my memories are fragmented. This has led me to speculate about what might have occurred once the 'zoning out' kicked in.



“ As a child, I didn't understand I was being sexually abused. I just knew I didn't like it, didn't want it, that it was a secret and it was wrong

Of course, one thinks the worst, especially with all the lurid Jimmy Savile and Gary Glitter type stories, which is not healthy – suspicion and paranoia lead to mental health issues.

The ‘zoning out’ during the abuse was effectively like putting myself to sleep, so I didn’t have to fully experience what was happening. There is a parallel between the state of sleeping (natural) and the state of ‘zoning out’ (a coping mechanism).

I have suffered terribly with nightmares throughout my life. It sounds so silly but this cannot be overestimated. Fear, real fear, is mentally and physically experienced when you are most vulnerable, when you are sleeping. I am convinced my brother abused me while I slept. I was scared to go to sleep because of what might happen to me. Fear was always hanging over me. It’s awful for a child to live in fear.

The abuse is re-experienced in my nightmares. My body becomes paralysed. My throat is constricted. I am unable to scream or speak, to call out or to indicate for help in any way. I am totally helpless. Horrified. Terrorised. I wake up believing what I dreamt has actually happened in the night to me now, as an adult. The abuse ended when I was seven but the nightmares have stayed with me throughout my life. I can control my mind and thoughts when awake but I can’t control my mind when asleep!

I first spoke about what happened to me when I was around 16. I didn’t intend to, it just came out. I had been allowed by my family to go on a school trip – the first and only one in my life (money was tight and my parents didn’t want me socialising with boys). Looking back, I realise it was my first breakdown. I basically flipped out, released a load of anger, shouting at the teachers about what had happened to me and how stupid they were for not realising, not caring – how they had failed me. I blamed them... I blamed everyone... my teachers, my dad... all the racist people who I hated... I blamed everyone except my brother! Messed up, huh?

The thing to remember is although my brother did what he did, when he wasn’t abusing me, which was the majority of the time, he was gentle and kind which contrasted to growing up in an environment where as a family we often experienced unpleasantness. He wasn’t a ‘monster’. This is part of the confusion – if he was horrible, it would be so much easier to deal with. I could really hate him then. But I don’t, I just hate what he did.

After my outburst, I told my teachers I never wanted to speak about it again. After leaving school, I discovered drink, drugs and partying, which provided short term, much-needed but ultimately illusory relief. Under the influence of drink or drugs I would open up on a few occasions about the abuse. But it’s not to be advised – there’s no better mood-killer than: “Oh by the way, my brother sexually abused me when I was a little girl.”

The drugs weren’t really working (they never do). The feelings I was trying to avoid were still there once the effects of the drugs were over, leaving me feeling even worse. To avoid my life derailing, out of necessity, I had some therapy in my early 20s. I was very angry and needed to offload. The therapy helped. I dealt with some of the anger. I stupidly thought that that was it – I had ‘dealt with it’. How foolish of me... I hadn’t even scratched the surface.

Afterwards I thought I was ‘all sorted now’ and promptly got on with my life in my 20s and 30s. I had a good career and loving partners who I would never commit to. Of course, I was not really addressing the issue. I was shocked when I had a breakdown in my late 30s. I thought I was coping, that I was ‘alright’. My fear is there will come a time when ‘the big one’ will come. And that if I have a child, a little girl, I will literally be faced with stuff I have buried deep for so long. Well – I am not going to let fear rule my life any more.

After my breakdown in my late 30s I embarked on more therapy – CBT, art therapy, group therapy... never-ending therapy! Depending on who you speak to I have post-traumatic stress disorder, arrested development, a wounded inner child etc. If I hear there is a new therapy that is supposed to be life-changing, I think maybe that therapy will be the one to ‘settle me’? Or maybe not? This latest round of therapy helped me finally to open up to those closest to me, so I am not carrying this alone.

I finally confronted my brother face-to-face. I just had to. I prepared myself for the worst, that he would minimise or deny what happened. But he didn’t. He was a broken man. He said he was ashamed, and he could never forgive himself... but he asked me to forgive him. So that’s where I am... still not fully to terms with it, stuff still unprocessed, being asked to forgive the unforgivable. Well, I’m in no rush, I’ve lived with it in silence all these years. Now the secret is out, at least it is between me, my brother, partner, sisters and two best friends. That’s enough for me for now.

“ He wasn’t a ‘monster’. This is part of the confusion – if he was horrible, it would be so much easier to deal with. I could really hate him then. But I don’t, I just hate what he did

T.M. FEMALE

Incest: Unblocking our family drains

I am an unrecorded statistic of incest from a so-called 'normal', 'respectable', 'professional' family.

As I write this behind my closed door only a handful of people know. None of my friends or neighbours know. Finally after over 40 years I've found the courage to speak up. I've found out how to unblock the family drains. With expert help I've finally found the only way out of the darkness. I am now surfacing for the first time.

People think I'm so lucky. If only they knew. Not even all the workmen renovating my house would guess that every waking moment I bear the pressure of concealing a complex double life. Every day I've been protecting our family name; protecting my elderly mother, my successful adult siblings and all our kids.

Born much younger in the hierarchy, I was so proud to be part of our huge extended family. I was in awe of my older brothers and sisters, excited when the last baby came along in our busy, rambling household. I wanted to believe that I'd had the perfect happy childhood, cradled in the safety of our 'watchful' neighbourhood. I was thankful for my respected parents and relatives, who were all pillars of the community; involved with charities, church and schools.

There is no easy way to say this, but as I was growing up in the 60s and 70s I was sexually abused many times. I didn't have the vocabulary or opportunity to explain. I didn't understand the severity or long-term impact of the emotional roller-coaster ride, which I've always masked with my laughter, compassion and smiles.

I'm ashamed to say that it was my father. He was kind. Everyone loved him despite his mood swings and private temper. It would have been easier to accept if he was a horrid person. It's still so confusing and surreal. I'd like to say it was because he wasn't well. But the truth is, his inexcusable covert behaviour wrecked my true identity. It stole my confidence, potential and career. It vandalised my childhood and my adult reality. His betrayal left indelible scars throughout my life.

I don't know how I had the courage to tell my husband when I met him so young. He's been my rock, without him I wouldn't have survived.

Over the years I was referred to well-meaning counsellors, but the expensive sessions were never long enough. Their inexperience in dealing with the multiple dynamics of large families, let alone childhood sexual abuse (CSA), submerged me even further. It was a different era, impossible to track down specialist help without the use of today's technology or a private mobile phone.

After Dad died, flashbacks of what had happened to me became stronger. I was concerned it had happened to others, even outside the family. I had a knowing without knowing, terrified of exposure, and torn by wanting to ensure that no one else needed help. In order to forewarn my siblings it meant I had to reveal what had happened to me. I had to risk their possible denial or rejection. I didn't want to be the one to shatter their image of Dad, while considering the impact on my unsuspecting Mum. After all I had done nothing wrong. I'm still only 'the messenger'.

The pressure of being the happy peace-maker heightened while hosting family gatherings. Trying to speak discreetly, while caught in the middle of an endless game of three-dimensional chess; as a daughter caring for my widowed mother, a unifying sibling, supportive wife and busy parent working from home.

By now I was desperate. My girls were around the same age. Memories came flooding back. Everything was closing in. Fighting back suicidal thoughts again. No one must find out or tell the kids. Masked by my 'cheerful mum' facade, hectic schedule, schools and busy clubs. I quietly slipped away with conflicting noises screaming in my head. Smiling from the edges of sports fields, their childhood years became a blur.

The stress of carrying the family shame was magnified by people's reactions to news stories about celebrity and institutional abuse. I'd like to explain to our friends that we haven't been ignoring them all these years but just trying to survive. Hiding the secret also meant that we couldn't commit to invites or events. Patiently the kids had to keep switching arrangements with their friends. If only I'd realised how difficult it would be to return to the same community I grew up in. So many people knew my Dad. The fear of triggers and anxiety of blurting it out unexpectedly has meant adapting daily routines, avoidance and isolation.

After hitting rock bottom again a couple of years ago, I urgently needed to find the right help. The turning point came with having my own private laptop. Distressingly before that I couldn't look up

“ As I write this behind my closed door only a handful of people know. None of my friends or neighbours know. Finally after over 40 years I've found the courage to speak up

advice or helpline numbers. I was too scared to key in certain words, as web pages would shoot back up on the family's communal screen.

With my last hope and prayer I miraculously found a leading expert with extensive experience in the complexity of incest within large families. I was rescued just in time. She helped me overcome the plummeting impact of complex PTSD. She gave me the confidence to face my fears. Gradually, one by one I disclosed to the rest of my shocked but supportive siblings and kids, and told them of the help I'd found. The revelations that followed were extremely hard, as some older siblings had also been abused by my Dad. It affected each in different ways as they tried to keep it locked away inside.

After all the wasted years it was so important to me that everyone stayed united as a family. So my inspirational counsellor aided some special family awareness sessions, with those overseas joining us on Skype. Having devised an agenda to suit our precise needs the huge progress has been a massive relief for us all. Some had initial fears, but they now see how everyone is benefiting from unblocking all the drains. It would have been so difficult if the others had stayed in denial or not corroborated my experience, because as a 'junior' sibling I often felt my views were dismissed.

With different fluctuating responses and emotions, we are all still learning how to cope with the impact and implications around disclosure to the wider family and beyond. No one can assume that what happened to one person would have the same impact on another. The abuses occurred at different child development stages. No one has the right to say: "Pull yourself together". Despite all being from the same family with the same parents, the large age range means we've all had such different childhood experiences and outlooks on life, depending on our sibling order and gender. As the different pieces of our family jigsaw have come together, things now make sense.

Some people can only see things from their own perspective. Sadly it was the 'good'

“ After years of anguish my family are finally breaking the silence. It's okay to be vulnerable and to ask for help. Holding it in only impacts on others

people trying to help who delayed my recovery over the years. They couldn't see the urgency or ripple effect. I was misunderstood and misinterpreted and my pleas for very specific help were often miscommunicated. I can't help feeling angry that the people who I originally approached for help got it wrong and prolonged the blockage. I felt invisible, unworthy and powerless.

For years I had wanted to tell our elderly mother but I'd been warned: "Don't ruin her life, she'll die of shock". The break through came recently when I wrote her a letter. I read it out explaining how I needed to make a positive outcome from the desperately negative issues, and how all the kids and siblings have had help to move forwards together. Her response was such a relief. She hadn't known. She was upset that I wasn't able to tell her sooner, and that others didn't consider she'd want to help us put things right. She's been so supportive.

After years of anguish my family are finally breaking the silence. It's okay to be vulnerable and to ask for help. Holding it in only impacts on others. Some had buried it unaware that they, or others, needed specialist help. The cycle of family secrets and the burden of carrying the generational shame are the source of misplaced power and control. Supporting friends and relatives please listen until you understand the need for positive change and don't minimise the reality. To responsibly communicate the full destructive impact of incest will help jettison the blockages, and clear out the 'I'm too busy to notice' crap.

Since starting this piece our workmen have finished. We've found the way to replace the rotten wood with our strong new timber. By changing people's attitudes and awareness of CSA we are being released from its devastating stronghold. Empowered with insight our grown daughters and sons are now highlighting the need to sensitively address 'the elephant in the room'. There are now increasing resources for everyone to learn how to talk about it.

Despite being distanced, my kids and their cousins have re-joined to become the strong new branches, reaching out from our unified family tree. It hasn't been easy, but they are proof that with VISION and with the RIGHT EXPERT GUIDANCE families are not only healing and transforming, but also showing the way to the ENTIRELY PREVENTABLE CSA.



Gerard MALE

I am writing this in the hope of reaching others who have been affected by the horrifying damage of sexual abuse, to know that you are not alone and there are people who love you and feel your pain. And that as hard as it is, speaking out, when ready, in the right place, can be the most liberating thing on your journey of healing.

I am also writing to those in the caring and medical services, schools, along with friends and families of survivors, to maybe understand the depth of the impact of sexual abuse, and maybe become more aware of spotting it in children.

I was sexually abused by my mother. Every part of me felt ruined by this all the way through me right to my soul. I thought I was the only one. It was something I was certain I would never and could never speak about. I didn't even see it as sexual abuse when I was a child as I only heard of uncles abusing or perverts in parks, not of a female, let alone a mother, so I saw myself as having the most vile terrifying and disgusting things happen to me. But it must have been my fault because it never happened to anyone else in the world ever, and that's why I thought I was the most disgusting thing on the planet. Even though I tried to stop it in any way I could think of, I was also dependant on this person for my life, food and shelter.

My first memories of it were as a five-year-old and I still can't get the contaminated feelings and taste out of my mouth from what she made me do, and I feel sick writing about it.

I feel I didn't have a childhood. I have felt so horribly isolated and alone in a world that was unsafe especially at home in any room, at any time. I tried to speak out when I was five, but nothing was done and it just made it worse, as I was told by my mother that no one wanted to know and no one would believe me.

From then on, I just thought that horrifying unfathomable things happened to me and that was the way life was. I was raped by a man at the age of eight, and I just put it down to part of the bad things that happened, even though I

“ I was sexually abused by my mother. Every part of me felt ruined by this all the way through me right to my soul. I thought I was the only one. It was something I was certain I would never and could never speak about

thought the pain was going to kill me and I was petrified. When he told me that if I told anyone he would come and get me, I thought of course I won't tell anyone, it didn't enter my mind, and who would I tell anyway? What happened to me didn't matter to anyone.

As a young child I felt completely different to everyone else. I knew I only had myself to depend on. I cannot remember any moment in my childhood ever being truly happy.

It is amazing that never once did anyone ask me what was wrong, even when in my later teens I was getting in lots of trouble. The only way I thought I could connect with others was by being outrageous in one form or another, by getting myself in trouble being destructive or extreme in order to hide the feelings of worthlessness and burning shame.

I do recall I did once say something to a doctor and afterwards someone came to visit, presumably a social worker, but when I saw I was causing trouble, I retracted it. I was told no one wanted to hear what I had to say or would ever believe me. That really shut me down and further silenced and isolated me.

Everything I had ever done in my adult life felt ruined and pointless because I believed



I was flawed, not human, a worthless bit of sub-human scum that deserved to be killed for being abused by my mother. I thought, literally, if I told anyone then they would kill me, and that would be right and what I deserved. I see now I was carrying the thoughts that belonged to her. I always felt contaminated and unclean.

I always felt like a freak that no one could ever like, let alone love, if they really knew the truth. I kept a large part of myself away from anyone who was a friend, which in turn left me feeling very lonely and not understood. I had a some long-term relationships with women, but chose partners who I could see were not well balanced or suited to me, and would not treat me nicely. I felt I had to put up with this.

Self-annihilation, utter isolation, shame, self-disgust, extreme trauma, anxiety, depression and anger are all things I have lived with throughout my life; with the resulting self-harm in many forms through having no value to my life, and addictive tendencies to keep away from my inner reality and beliefs. Dissociation with much lost time, which is a subconscious way of keeping away from this inner reality. This was useful as a child so as to disconnect from unbearable inescapable situations, but can be a huge hindrance as an adult. Waking up screaming in the middle of the night or not sleeping at all for very long periods, or indeed being overwhelmed with flashbacks, visual and non-visual, day and night, as if in my worst nightmare, and resulting suicide attempts. These were all my symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

The horror of the years of abuse, which was emotional and physical also, at times torturous on all levels, still haunts me. At times I felt crippled with pain so intense that it knocked me off my feet and I lay in a sobbing screaming ball on the floor, feeling such intense pain as what she did to me seemed worse than death. The horrid disgusting, contaminating, vile, and most disgusting thing that could happen and the betrayal by the person who brought me into the world – breaking what I believe should be a sacred bond.

Until a few years ago I thought I was the only person in the world that this had happened to. Then I read an account by a man who was also abused by his mother. I was overwhelmed, and the fact he also didn't think he was human, made me challenge this belief in myself. If he was human then I must be too. My road

to recovery began and I managed to tell a friend. To me this was a huge risk, which it seemed could almost be fatal. I then had the fortune to find a therapist (which seemed an even bigger risk) who had the amazing skill and patience, kindness and care to reach me and help me see the truth of the situation, so I could begin to actually value and love myself. This is something that seemed impossible. The gaping, painful hole in my chest that I had always felt, as if my heart had been ripped out, began to fill with light.

What I have come to see, by having therapy and working on my self, is that the feelings of worthlessness, contamination and self-disgust were a story I was telling myself. These feelings about myself weren't the real truth, but I couldn't see that until I worked with a counsellor. These feelings about myself were lies that I was telling myself, attaching these self-annihilating thoughts to debilitating feelings. I did this unconsciously as a child to gain some control, because accepting the real truth as a young child, of the reality of my situation and my world, would have been too much to acknowledge. I always had a part of me that still had hope though, like an inner part of my soul that was burning bright and alive although hidden at times.

By taking what felt like a big risk of having counselling, when I was at a point where I had tried everything else, and it seemed like the only other option than death, I found the only way to recovery for me. I know I still struggle and can't change what has happened. I have learned, and am very much still learning, to be at peace with myself and learn from all this. I struggle to have intimate relationships with a female, even though I think I would like a partner to share life and intimacy with. At the moment the more I am connected with myself, the more disturbing intimate contact feels. This may change and the most important thing is that I have myself, and can hold myself and I know that is all I need.

The most corrosive and debilitating thing for me in my life has been the silence around the awful things that happened to me, which allowed all the harmful thoughts and emotions to fester and grow with extremely damaging disfiguring, almost fatal results.

The more the silence is broken, and the more care and understanding is shown, the more survivors may be freed from crippling mental chains.

“ The horror of the years of abuse, which was emotional and physical also, at times torturous on all levels, still haunts me. At times I felt crippled with pain so intense that it knocked me off my feet and I lay in a sobbing screaming ball on the floor

Rachel FEMALE

I am a suffering survivor of childhood sexual abuse and it seems to me that as long as I live I will never be able to fully express the everlasting pain and confusion that being abused in childhood causes. The devastating long-term impact is shocking and wholly underestimated by survivors themselves and the world around us. Trying to understand it is mind-blowing and trying to explain it to others feels impossible.

Being ‘picked out’ in childhood and exposed to secret, disgusting sexual abuse isolates you from the world. You live in constant fear and a state of deep shame and guilt without even knowing it, except for a sense of feeling separate or different. Even now in adulthood I feel separate, I have a whole other inner existence that nobody else is aware of. My family and friends all know about my abuse now but I am still locked in the reaction of keeping myself safe – overly aware of my surroundings, never relaxing or switching off – like being haunted.

I feel even more isolated when I find I am unable to explain this existence to others and to express the ‘current-ness’ of my pain and how life consuming it is. Most things that happen in the past are overcome-able with time. But with childhood sexual abuse it seems to be the opposite. Escaping, running away, denial, drug abuse, wild partying, alcohol carnage, ‘workaholism’, strenuous physical activity and years of excessive living takes up a lot of ‘time’ but can’t be sustained forever – in the end ‘time’ runs out and the truth begins to take a hold.

But who can empathise with terrifying childhood abuse and the immeasurable self-loathing and life-long misery it creates? I get really hurt when people say things like: “Can you let go now?” or: “Can you move on?” How can I let go of who I became? Who I am? How can I ‘move on’ from the character I developed to help me survive child abuse and keep it a secret from the world? However, I fully understand this confusion because for twenty years, even as a victim myself, I too had absolutely no idea of the permanent and continuing damage.

I was being abused for about two years between the ages of nine and 11. My abuser was my mum’s best friend’s husband. They had no children and I was like a surrogate daughter to them. The wife was my ‘Mam Two’, and her husband was my monster. The abuse was sold to me in various ways over time – to begin with as ‘a game’ or ‘a treat,’ and later it had to be a secret because: “People won’t like you if they know what WE do”. And then eventually terror. One day he took me to his living room window and showed me a police car and told me that it was: “Keeping an eye on people like us” and that this car would take me to jail if they ever knew what ‘I’ had done. I suddenly felt terrified and extremely confused by this, because my parents had always told me that the police were our friends and that if ever I was in trouble I should call a policeman.

So as I stood by the window, now a criminal who should go to prison, now complicit in this filth, I can remember feeling totally helpless and ashamed. It was at this very moment that I can remember the feeling of having a heart that is broken – but it was in this same moment I remember my heart turning to stone. A feeling of darkness and hatred and coldness sweep through my body. I had to get myself out of this situation. I had to come up with a plan.

“Most things that happen in the past are overcome-able with time. But with childhood sexual abuse it seems to be the opposite”





I created an elaborate world of activity in order not to go to the abuser's house anymore, whilst simultaneously trying not to arouse suspicion because, of course, nobody could know the truth. I was about 10 or 11 years old at this point and in order to execute 'my plan' I had to harden myself. And from this day forward I 'switched off.' I don't even know that little girl anymore - she never grew. I became locked in a state of loneliness and fear. I had a total lack of care and respect for myself and developed a permanently fixed feeling of grubbiness and worthlessness. My only tools were my strength and my wits and I harnessed a feeling of invincibility. This was my survival. And it was a brilliant cover - one that kept me very safe from further danger and violations and stopped me from feeling anything - ever!

And so, from the age of 11, through all my teens (needless to say my education was shot) and throughout my twenties, I somehow suppressed and denied the trauma and grew to believe that I was one of the lucky ones - strong enough and tough enough to overcome childhood abuse without a hitch. Not only could I live my life 'normally' but I seemed stronger and tougher than anyone else around me. I felt completely immune to being hurt physically and I had no idea that you could be hurt emotionally.

“ However hard I worked, however much I pushed myself, however much strength, determination and desperation I used to drag myself up - I just kept slipping back down into the abyss

How awful for all my friends that they get upset and confused about things. It would be so much easier for them if they were a bit like me. I am invincible. Thank goodness they hadn't been abused like me - they would never have coped.

I was doing everything everybody else seemed to do and sometimes with bells on - no hiccups, no downtime, none of this depression malarkey, none of this crying business - just getting on. But I was only partly living, confined to a horrible bubble of endless activity and confusion where I was unable to properly see, hear or feel the world around me. The worst thing is, that I was completely unaware of my dissociative behaviour and pain - I thought this was normal. And I continued like this for over twenty years....

Until one day I was struck down by an illness that shocked and ruined me. It was almost overnight that I became severely ill with what was subsequently diagnosed as ME. There I was galloping along at a million miles an hour and the next thing I knew, I'd been thrown from my speeding freight train of an existence into a dark bottomless pit of physical debility that I could not scrape myself out of. However hard I worked, however much I pushed myself, however much strength, determination and desperation I used to drag myself up - I just kept slipping back down into the abyss.

ME caused me to suffer from extreme symptoms of fatigue and physical paralysis. For two or three years I could barely drag myself around my flat and for three to four days of every week I had to spend the entire day confined to my sofa. I couldn't get up to fetch water or food and I would have to use 'life or death' type energy to pull a blanket over my body, or reach for socks for my freezing cold feet.

It's like feeling physically dead whilst being totally wide-awake - like a nightmare. I suffered from constant joint pain, gained five stone in weight in 18 months, endured over 120 episodes of recurrent shingles and experienced bouts of hysteria, mania, OCD and major memory loss. I couldn't write, read or spell properly. My whole world, body and brain was closing down on me. I was too wrecked to talk or have company, read a book or listen to the TV or even the radio.

I had to give up my work, my career and the life I had created for myself. I eventually had to move out of my flat in London, put all my furniture and belongings into storage and move into my mum's house, in my hometown where I

had been abused. I've spent all my savings and amassed huge debt paying for treatment for the ME and all the associated symptoms and trying to live with no proper income from working.

Shortly after moving back to my hometown I started to experience terrifying flashbacks of my abuse and stark vivid memories of my abuser. This was diagnosed as complex and chronic PTSD (formerly known as shell shock). I was told by medical professionals that the ME and PTSD were the long-term consequences of the childhood abuse and my suppression of the traumas. I found this very difficult to accept, of course, because I really believed I was 'above and beyond' being affected by the abuse. But, eventually, with no life, constant physical pain and the uncontrollable flashbacks, I had to accept that childhood sexual abuse was non-negotiable and had, in the end, caused me to be very ill.

I was told by the cognitive analyst who specialises in the link between childhood abuse and ME that I had to confront and process my childhood experiences, or I would continue to suffer with ME and PTSD – my unconscious brain and body would always be in 'running away mode' and would keep causing these dramatic bio-chemical reactions, which in turn were causing the debilitating illnesses. Denial and avoidance were not helping me. So to try and get better, I followed a three-year programme of trauma therapy.

During this process, I realised how devious and destructive my abuser's campaign against me was, and how my fear-ridden existence was worsened by his continual presence in my life (i.e. regularly coming to the family home, Christmas morning visits, knowing my friends, my husband, and even coming to my father's funeral). As I began to accept the horror and reality of my history I became very angry and I sent my abuser a letter to which he replied with a terse apology. His letter contained no genuine remorse and was solely designed to shut me up. So I took it to the police, which led eventually to a crown court trial where he was found guilty on all counts and sent to prison.

In order for this to happen of course, I had to tell my mum – one of the hardest things I have ever done. And although he had admitted his crimes in the secret letter to me, he publicly denied the charges (believing, no doubt, that he could still somehow get away with it – as he had done for all those years). This meant that I had to share the horror in open court in front of the judge and jury and be cross-examined – this was a gruelling

experience. Especially knowing that my mother and sister would hear all the gruesome details from the public gallery.

My survival now, is based on the fact that I had a wonderful upbringing in a house that was full of love, music, books, poetry, literature, history and story-telling, where I was inspired and encouraged to follow my dreams. Those dreams and my real character were trashed by the abuse. But I have been helped by my family and my amazing friends, the people of my hometown, who have shown unwavering solidarity, and the charity One in Four and fantastic police officers. And crucially, by the medical professionals coming together to provide long-term specific treatment which has been my lifeline.

I am getting better but my life is very difficult. I am still living with my mum and unable to work properly. I am seven years out of my career now, which really worries me. I need help in many areas of life and find intimate relationships very difficult. I have no partner, no children, no career, no money, no home and feel continually anxious. But, at least, finally – I am living my truth. I don't have to run or hide. The bubble has gone, things hurt me now, I am not invincible – and however horrible this might be, at least it is real.



“ During this process, I realised how devious and destructive my abuser's campaign against me was and how my fear-ridden existence was worsened by his continual presence in my life

Maud FEMALE

From an early age I was always looking for something – I didn't know what it was but it was something. I always felt lost and alone, even within my family, with friends, at school and at parties. Although I had a brother and sisters I never felt connected to them. Even though I was the third child I too felt I was the 'and', and wherever we went, I was found tagging along at the back.

It wasn't until recently, in my 60s, that I realised what it was I was searching for, and how this has been offered to me through the years by my therapist. I didn't realise that what she offered me was the part that my mother couldn't, or wouldn't give to me – to listen. All my life I blamed myself for not being heard or understood, thinking that there was something wrong in my communication and that my mother was trying hard to understand, but that I prevented her from hearing me.

What was confusing was that my mother seemed to be able to be available to my siblings, especially my younger sister. She was more than able to listen and respond to her and be available whenever she was needed. My mother made sure that my younger sister's needs were met at all times, even if it meant ignoring my or my other siblings' needs. Even as I write this I am consumed with guilt, and fear my mother's reaction to these words, even though she has been dead for 30 years. If she were able to read this she would be furious and blame me for being selfish and spoilt.

This was the pattern of my life up until I was a teenager, when I was sent to a psychiatrist to find out what was wrong with me. I had missed out on most of my school years and was absent for huge chunks of time. Finally, the truant officer came calling and my mother blamed me for not going to school. As a result I had to go to court, was put on probation, allocated a social worker and sent to a psychiatrist. Despite all these professionals being involved, no-one was able to work out why I was absent from school.

No-one asked me and I could not tell them. I was silenced by mother and terrified to tell the

“ **When I found the right therapist who gave me time, had patience and allowed me to push boundaries without judgement and kept me safe, I slowly began to trust for the first time ever**

truth – that my mother was sexually abusing me. Each morning before school she would call me to come to her bed on the pretence of wanting to be comforted. Her insistent pleading and calling for me meant I had no choice but to comply by going to her. The psychiatrist sensed that there was something unhealthy in my relationship with my mother but I couldn't tell him that, as my mother said I would be seen as crazy and sent to an institution. So I lied and defended her to protect her, as the only time I felt any closeness to her was when she was sexually intimate with me. Because I was unable to tell, the abuse continued until I was in my 20s.

So although I gained some closeness to my mother, it was at a huge cost. Now, I can see how this has affected me in terms of not gaining an education, never being able to have a relationship, having no children, no family and being absolutely terrified of people. I am even scared of my therapist, even though she is the one and only person I truly trust and can be honest with. All my life I have been too scared to live and feel sad that I can't have relationships with others, including my siblings. Because of the lack of trust in professionals, and the number of counsellors who tried to help but couldn't listen and didn't understand, I started to self-harm and play Russian roulette with my life – mixing alcohol with medication, stepping in front of traffic and not wanting to be here but too scared to take my own life.

My first psychiatrist sensed there was something wrong but did not take action. I would have stopped him as I feared the consequences of the abuse coming out and being punished by my mother. I couldn't afford to upset my mother so I had to put him off the scent by telling him how wonderful my mother was. In writing this, I can't help wondering what would have happened if I had been able to open up to one of the many professionals who saw me – would they have been able to stop the abuse, would I have been safe, or would my mother's prediction have come true and I would have ended up in a psychiatric institution? I wonder would I have married, would I have had children? As it is, I have never been able to form a relationship with anyone. If I had been able to trust and found the right person, would I have been able to live more?

All I can say is, when I found the right therapist who gave me time, had patience and allowed me to push boundaries without judgement and kept me safe, I slowly began to trust for the first time ever. Despite pushing boundaries endlessly and sometimes cruelly, my therapist remained

“ After all these years of keeping silent, pushing people away and hiding my shame, I have finally found my voice and have been heard

constant and consistent. At times I despised her for this and became furious with her for not showing me the door, rejecting me or giving up on me. At times it felt it would have been easier had she done so, as that would be proof that my mother was right that I was the crazy one who was unlovable and did not deserve to be cared for. I still occasionally struggle to understand how my therapist can listen to me and be there for me when the one person who should have been able to do that, didn't.

All I ever wanted to do was to live and trust my mother and she abused that. She also prevented me from having a relationship with my father, which is something I didn't realise until after she died. Through therapy I realised that by having to keep this secret and to lie stopped me from being close to my father and my siblings for fear that the secret would come out. What has struck me writing this is that, through the sexual abuse, I was prevented from receiving care and affection from my family, which has left me with a huge sense of emptiness and aloneness all my life that I have never been able to fill despite alcohol and medication. Now, finally I am in a better place, and although the emptiness and the loneliness is still there it is not as big, and I am more able to accept myself and have started to actually like myself at times. I now realise it is the shame of the abuse and what my mother did that has crippled me, not because I am flawed or defective. I am finally beginning to make some sense of a world that has always been confusing, where I have known and not known that there is something wrong.

It has taken me a long time to get here, and to realise that my whole life was lived in a fog of dissociation in which I was constantly confused and uncertain. Finally, when the fog is lifting, I have days of clarity and waking up and thinking I am glad to be here and appreciate being alive. I have stopped continually searching for the lost part, as I have finally found what I have been looking for all my life – my voice. After all these years of keeping silent, pushing people away and hiding my shame, I have finally found my voice and have been heard. Not every day is great and there are pockets and moments of difficulty, but overall I am glad to be here.

I believe that the unstinting support from my therapist in wanting to hear my voice, and now writing this, is a testament to finding my voice, which is allowing me to be human and listened to. I have finally found my voice and want to sing each day.

Ann **FEMALE**

To my first abuser

I was six years old when you murdered my spirit, soul and childhood, left me with a carcass, a shell in which your parasite roamed freely to every corner. You were at least twice my size and unrestrained you stripped me of dignity and penetrated me time and time again. You took the flowers of my soul and replaced them with thistles and weeds. Shame, fear, anxiety, depression and anger were the worst of them, then you incarcerated me for the crime you committed. You changed my perspective and my approach to life. I didn't want anyone else to know that my family didn't look after me, that the garden of my soul was full of toxic carcinogens and that insects of misunderstanding, loneliness and mistrust in every day life would nourish themselves on desperately undernourished remains. You removed all sense of balance, boundaries, trust and love in my life.

After two years of silence, I tried to tell my mother what had happened. I didn't have the vocabulary to articulate it and she dismissed what I had said. Shame wouldn't let me speak of it again. Bereaved and betrayed by my most trusted person, the seeds of my once flowers tried to bud from time to time, but between the put-downs of slow learning and an inability to socialise with my peers, the deep thinker struggled to find anyone to engage with and those buds were crushed.

Disorientated, wounded, unarmed and left in an internal war-strewn territory without a map, I searched for something but didn't know to look for a key to escape solitary confinement, it had become all I knew. A second perpetrator, a third. I had no idea how to accept love, and unable to trust, I never believed it when it was offered, so once someone had eventually nurtured a bud, I crushed it myself with low self-esteem. I couldn't read a book without my imagination being taken back to my own confused world. Flashbacks of your violations and perpetual cycles of catastrophic fantasy are frequent to this day, however I didn't know there was any other way to live until recently. I've experienced trauma outside that of which one would expect in life. I live with a heightened sense of threat, grenades are frequently triggered and I have to manage symptoms of post-traumatic stress and redress weeping wounds. I need great nutrients and mighty tools to control your noxious debris.

You shrouded every beautiful thing with filth. It was as if I looked through a smoky veil and this removed my ability to experience any moment in the present without the ball and chains of my lifelong silent, shameful prison sentence. For most of my life I even believed I deserved it. I had no self-love and respect, I didn't know what it was. You made sure I left my innocent child behind whilst my carcass grew. You carelessly and skilfully dismantled my human, emotionally asphyxiating me. Daily stress from that cauldron of tragedy, nearly 30 years on never relents.

You took more than my life, you took my life and made me pay the price. It would've been easier for me if you had physically murdered me, but the murder of one's soul is intangible, particularly as you did it in my childhood where no one could see who I would become without the shame of your crime and the thorns you left me with. Pain, humiliation, guilt, injustice, hatred, anger, fury and betrayal. Words don't come close to expressing the stratosphere of emotion I've experienced over this. I don't know how I'm still alive and I don't know how you could've been any more vulturous in my world.

Three years ago I broke the silence I thought I'd take to my grave. The response from the majority of my family was that of dismissal, trivialisation and ignorant assaults which crucified me at a time I needed most support of all. I'd felt disconnected from those closest to me all my life, then they confirmed it, it was my greatest fear. It seemed that I had traded agonising silence for further heartbreak of catastrophic magnitude. I had moved away at the age of 18 and currently the majority of my birth family are no longer in my life. I can't heal and reach for emotional freedom whilst risking further injury by a family unable to love as I need love, nor acknowledge the violations, open wounds, unimaginable loss or complexity of what I've experienced, all of which has been compounded by their dysfunctional response.


I tell very few people my history. How could my friend ever stretch to understanding my pain if she's never known trauma beyond a divorce? And I recognise the depth of this. No one hears my cries, no one hears how loud my heart hurts. I've needed every fibre of strength and more to function at work, pay for my house to keep myself safe and pay for therapy to get me to where I am today. I would love a family of my own, however there isn't energy left for much else and sometimes I already run on a deficit. That demon which overwhelms my mind and spirit, that beast and the baneful response of

my mother, my protector, my queen, that has shaped me.

I learnt that if I presented myself to the world the way I saw others, I could appear to function and keep myself safe. I learnt to make my own extreme needs appear invisible. I didn't know that my external self would be so well-versed in acting to be functional, whilst my internal self was managing both a stalled bereavement and my screaming child within. Even in silence, I could hear her (me), no one else could, but I didn't know how to find peace. I didn't know how grey my life was until I started to see colour.

I know that the path to healing is long, I have only just begun but am thankful to be on it at long last. The only sense that I have made of this is that my fate is to help others. Acceptance has been a gift but only rewarded after time and great pain. For me, a combination of Parks' Inner Child Therapy, acupuncture, physiotherapy, regular exercise, increased water intake and a nourishing diet with herbal and vitamin supplements were all part of re-establishing association of mind and body, which I had lost sense of. The greatest therapist I met was able to recognise key issues likely to be associated with child sex abuse and implement methods to address them. She and I set an objective, which was (and still is) to restore a healthy emotional balance. Re-association of myself with my inner child was critical in teaching me self-love, respect and boundaries. Rapid belief restructuring radically reduced shame and subsequently reduced my need for perfectionism. Visualisation techniques, and the re-scripting of traumatic memories, creating new neural pathways helped to reduce stress. Help with recognising my own resources now allows my adult-self to take care of things without responding with my inner child's emotion, and this has led to better relationships at work and at home.

Meeting other survivors to rid myself of isolation has been equally as critical to my healing and I did this through the charity 'Into the Light' and on-going friendships with other survivors. I needed a holistic 'spirit, mind and body' therapy approach together with some life-coaching, but I only discovered this after years of misleading therapy which compounded my feeling of isolation and helplessness. It was time wasting and sent me into a spiral of debt at a time when I was least able to make decisions and feel empowered. I hope no survivor has to face this when they reach out to seek help, it's a terrifying step to take, yet the insight and moments of clarity are worth it.



“ You took more than my life, you took my life and made me pay the price... I don't know how I'm still alive and I don't know how you could've been any more vulturous in my world



What these survivors' narratives tell us

Analysis by child sexual abuse specialist Christiane Sanderson

The narratives included in this project bear witness to the lived experience of CSA in the family environment and provide illuminating testimony of the impact of CSA. In analysing these accounts a number of pivotal themes emerged (see Table 2, overleaf) which can be broadly summarised into three predominant themes (see Table 1 right): **personal impact**, **family impact** and **professional responses**. These themes provide rich evidence of what has been reported in the literature (Herman, 2001; Levine, 1997; 2010; Rothschild, 2002; Sanderson, 2006; 2013; van der Kolk, 2015) and make a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of how CSA in the family environment impacts on survivors.

Predominant themes

It is clear that CSA in the family environment leaves long-lasting wounds which continue to exert considerable influence into adulthood. The predominant impact of CSA on survivors consists of trauma reactions which elicit a range of emotional, cognitive and interpersonal responses such as fear, anxiety, shame, loss of identity, confusion and isolation. These commonly manifested in compromised mental and physical health, loss of sense of self, impaired relationships and sexuality, lack of educational attainment and vocational stability, as well as reduced life choices such as fear of having children.

The impact on family dynamics clustered around not having a voice and feeling silenced. A common theme was needing to protect other family members, including the abuser, and fear of the devastation that would result through disclosure. Disclosure was fraught with difficulties with many survivors not being believed, or being asked to retract, or scapegoated. In many cases this led to loss of the family, and for some having to leave the country in which they were raised. Given these complex family dynamics many survivors report having to live a double life in order to navigate family interactions and manage the impact of CSA.

Table 1 Summary of predominant themes

Personal impact	Trauma reactions, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal responses, shame, compromised mental and physical health, loss of identity, impaired relationships and sexuality, lack of educational and vocational attainment and reduced life choices.
Family impact	Not having a voice, feeling silenced, protecting others including the abuser, leading a double life, difficulties around disclosure, not being believed, being scapegoated and loss of family.
Professional responses	Poor understanding of CSA by professionals in relation to mental and physical health, increased vulnerability with some types of therapy, lack of specialist service provision. Positive impact of being heard and understood by professionals and specialist therapeutic intervention.

Many survivors wrote about how hard it was to access specialist therapeutic services, and how they were often misunderstood and misdiagnosed by professionals who were not able to link behaviour and presenting symptoms to a history of CSA. Some survivors felt that this lack of understanding from some mental health professionals and generic, short term counselling left them feeling more vulnerable, making it harder to seek further help. Conversely, those survivors who felt heard and understood by professionals found that they were able to gradually heal and recover from their abuse.

Pivotal themes

Subsumed under these three predominant themes were a number of pivotal themes which are essential in enhancing awareness of how CSA in the family environment impacts on survivors. Table 2 (below) highlights ten of the most commonly represented themes along with illustrative quotes from the narratives, each of which add to a deeper understanding of the lived experience of survivors of CSA.

It is clear that CSA in the family environment leaves long-lasting wounds which continue to exert considerable influence into adulthood

Table 2 Summary of pivotal themes

Theme	Description	Survivor quotes
Behind closed doors	The need for secrecy and silence to protect family members, including the abuser, means leading a double life in which external reality differs markedly from the survivor’s internal reality. The betrayal of trust, lack of boundaries, unpredictability and uncertainty leads to confusion and a range of emotional and cognitive responses including shame. Over time, distorted perceptions and behaviour become normalised.	<p>“They didn’t talk about it because it meant nothing, but because it meant everything”</p> <p>“Nobody wants to believe that this could happen in his or her family”</p>
Breaking the silence	Disclosure is invariably fraught with fear and anxiety and multiple attempts are often made to break the silence, especially when the secret became too big to handle. First disclosures were often met with disbelief, or ignored, while later disclosures, some not made until after the abuser’s death, were also judged, leaving the survivor with a further sense of betrayal. The impact of disclosure invariably had a significant impact on all family members, with some families severing all contact with the survivor, although some were able to gain positive support from siblings and non-abusing parent.	<p>“My mother simply ended the conversation and resumed her Hoovering”</p> <p>“I was told ‘Don’t do this to our family’”</p> <p>“I didn’t want to tell anyone – for it was my little secret – but it was too big for me to handle, too powerful and too much”</p> <p>“I was silenced by my mother and terrified to tell the truth”</p>
Living in a fog	A common trauma reaction is dissociation which is often experienced as numbness, confusion, feeling unreal, or living in a fog. While dissociation numbs the emotional pain by suppressing feelings, memories and the reality of the abuse, it can lead to fragmented memories making it harder to validate the abuse.	<p>“Teachers said ‘She gets distracted easily’ but I was disassociating”</p> <p>“I became a people-pleaser”</p> <p>“The fog is built on fear”</p>
Distorted and contorted	A common theme was confusion and the distortion of reality often reinforced by abusers who blame the survivor for the abuse, or imply that CSA is a normal part of a special and loving relationship. In this distortion the world is turned upside down: nothing makes sense and there is nothing to hold on to. To manage the distortion survivors have to contort their behaviour and sense of self.	<p>“He wasn’t a monster. This is part of the confusion”</p> <p>“The shame doesn’t belong to the victims. It belongs to the abusers”</p> <p>“Did I ‘relate sexually’ when I was less than two years old?”</p>
Sad, bad or normal	Survivors of CSA commonly experience a range of trauma reactions, such as complex PTSD and mental health problems. Many survivors experienced depression, and anxiety disorders such as OCD, as well as problems with alcohol and addictions especially to drugs, food, and sex. Some had a long history of eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Some had a number of breakdowns, or were misdiagnosed which delayed their healing and recovery.	<p>“It’s not just the abuse itself that damages, it’s the in-between bits”</p> <p>“For large parts of my life I hated myself, wished I was dead, wished I had never been born”</p>

Theme	Description	Survivor quotes
The body keeps the score	Many survivors experienced a wide range of unexplained physical illnesses such as chronic genital pain, feelings of paralysis, as well as hyper-immune disorders, allergies, myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and chronic fatigue syndrome.	"I had to accept that childhood sexual abuse was non-negotiable and had, in the end, caused me to be very ill"
A life half lived	The fear and terror experienced by survivors means that they are unable to trust others, let alone themselves. Alongside this, shame and needing to keep the secret means that many survivors withdraw from others. This leads to self-imposed isolation, loneliness, inability to socialise and fear of intimacy and relationships. Many survivors report not being able to live fully, living in their heads while cut off from their bodies, and a lack of spontaneity and ability to engage in the world.	"It was one isolated incident but its impact on my life has been fundamental" "I felt a level of shame that I could only be in the world if I wore a mask" "I still grieve for the loss of a family I could have had and the absence of a safe and carefree childhood. All the things that I believe are the right of anyone"
Scared to be me	Many survivors felt they lost their sense of self and experienced damage to their identity. They felt different to everyone else and experienced a sense of worthlessness, powerlessness, low self-esteem, self-loathing and lack of self-respect. The lack of self prompted many to wear a mask to cover up their inner pain, or to render themselves invisible or invincible. As a result many were too scared and ashamed to be themselves, often leading a double life in which outwardly they appeared to be happy while internally they were suffering and falling apart.	"I perfected the art of looking happy" "The abuse forced me to lie, to lie to others but most importantly to lie to myself" "Fear, obligation and guilt are the abuser's keys to your prison" "Trying anything possible not to be a good girl"
I was robbed	CSA incurs myriad losses not least the loss of childhood and the loss of a healthy family life and relationships. Many described being robbed of self-worth, self-respect, self-belief and inner peace. Many survivors felt that their childhood and sexuality had been stolen along with opportunities to have stable relationships and children and families of their own.	"[His behaviour] vandalised my childhood and my adult reality" "I was horrified by the risk of fatherhood... the world needed no more like me, and I would not wish that on a child"
Seeking help	The lack of understanding of the impact of CSA and limited access to specialist services meant that many survivors were misdiagnosed or referred to unhelpful counselling which often made them feel more vulnerable. Professionals were often not able to link behaviour and presenting symptoms to a history of CSA and lacked understanding and knowledge about the impact of sexual abuse. Conversely, those survivors who felt heard and understood by professionals found that they were able gradually to heal and recover from their abuse.	"Twelve weeks of NHS therapy... left me more vulnerable" "I can't help feeling angry that the people I originally approached for help got it wrong" "I have had about a decade of therapy. That is not enough" "With expert help... I am now surfacing for the first time"
Seeing in colour	Survivors who had access to specialist therapy or support from other survivors through group therapy or psycho-educational workshops found that they were able to recover and heal from CSA and experience post-traumatic growth. This allowed them to break the cycle of abuse, find their voice and learn to live again.	"I didn't know how grey my life was until I began to see colour" "I have finally found what I have been looking for all my life – my voice" "My recovery is a life-long journey"

Behind closed doors

All the survivors who contributed to this project reported that CSA in the family environment necessitated silence and secrecy. To ensure that the abuse remained hidden many survivors had to deny it to themselves and others, often to protect siblings, the non-abusing parent(s) and the abuser, for fear of the consequences of exposure. Many survivors felt that to keep the secret they had to lead a complex double life in which their external reality was in stark contrast to their internal reality. This would commonly involve wearing a happy, smiling mask to cover the hurt and pain inside. All the survivors felt betrayed by their abuser, and some felt let down by other family members who were unable to read the signs of abuse, or failed to believe them, or to act when a disclosure was made.

Many survivors wrote about the lack of boundaries, and the pervasive uncertainty and unpredictability within the family environment which led to confusion and a sense of 'knowing and not knowing' that abuse was being perpetrated. What is clear is that CSA creates a ripple effect which reverberates throughout the whole family wherein the abuse is normalised, as everyone is drawn into a 'folie en famille' in order to keep the secret and prevent the truth from being exposed. Alongside this, some survivors were prevented from having a relationship with the non-abusing parent in order to minimise the risk of exposing the abuse, while others withdrew from close relationships with others to ensure that the secret would not be revealed inadvertently. This led to a sense of isolation and feeling trapped.

Breaking the silence

Many of the survivors wrote about the difficulties surrounding disclosure, with several reporting that multiple attempts at disclosure were made, and that initial disclosures made in childhood were often misunderstood, disbelieved or ignored not just by the family but also by professionals. For some, later disclosures were heard but often accompanied by being blamed for destroying, or bringing shame on the family. Some survivors worked very hard to protect the family and the abuser to keep the family together, and only broke the silence when they could no longer hold the secret, or after the abuser died. All the survivors shared either in their written accounts, or during the writing workshops, their fear of the repercussions of the truth coming out, such as being rejected by the family, being taken into care or causing more harm to the family. Some said

Many of the survivors wrote about the difficulties surrounding disclosure, with several reporting that multiple attempts at disclosure were made, and that initial disclosures made in childhood were often misunderstood, disbelieved or ignored

their fear of breaking the silence was so great that the only way to stop the abuse was either to run away from home or to sever all contact with the family in adulthood, including leaving the country in which they were raised.

Some survivors feared being re-traumatised through breaking the silence. This often prevented them from pursuing prosecution of the abuser; although three survivors attempted to prosecute their abuser, only one of them was successful. These fears proved to be a reality for a number of survivors who were disbelieved and subsequently rejected or disowned by the family. Many survivors who broke the silence felt that the abuse was either dismissed, trivialised or minimised, and were blamed for breaking-up the family. Those survivors who were disowned by their families often felt shame and blamed themselves for their family's disintegration.

A few survivors found support from siblings and the non-abusing parent when breaking the silence as adults, and some were able to reconcile and re-build the relationship with the non-abusing parent. One survivor discovered when she broke the silence that a number of other siblings had also been abused and this helped her to disclose to the non-abusing parent. Thus disclosure and breaking the silence is fraught with danger and long-lasting consequences such as re-traumatisation and the irrevocable loss of the family.

Living in a fog

A common experience identified by many survivors is a sense of numbness which is often described as feeling 'unreal', being 'zoned out' or 'living in a fog'. These are classic signs of dissociation, in which the emotional pain and memories of CSA are numbed through suppressing feelings and acknowledgement of the experience of the abuse as a way of escaping reality. Dissociation, while adaptive at the time of the abuse, ultimately leads to confusion, lack of focus, fragmented memories and an increased sense of unreality. Several survivors reported that 'zoning out' impaired their concentration which prevented them from reaching their full potential with regard to academic attainment and later vocational opportunities, as well as the processing of memories of the abuse.

For some survivors, dissociation manifested as escapism through reading or by dissociating from their body and 'living in their head' to suppress and numb feelings, and allow them to deny the impact of abuse. As a result many survivors find it difficult to feel anything or be spontaneous in their

interactions and are unable to link such reactions to the abuse. Some survivors felt that through dissociation they were able to 'split themselves in two' with one part being functional and seeking to protect others while the other part was disintegrating.

Distorted and contorted

The sense of unreality associated with dissociation is exacerbated through the distortion of reality by the dynamics of CSA in the family environment, in which abusers commonly project the responsibility for the abuse onto the survivor, implying that he or she wanted it, or by making them complicit in the abuse. Some survivors described how their reality was distorted by the abuser claiming that the sexual contact is a normal and a genuine expression of love, and an indicator of how 'special' the survivor is to them. This confusion between love and abuse meant survivors had to grapple with the paradox of knowing that something is wrong yet being told that it is normal, or having to deny that it is abuse to minimise the risk of exposure or the consequences of speaking out. To manage this 'knowing and not knowing,' many survivors had to fabricate a complex double life, in which they either became invisible or had to construct a mask, or facade to cover up reality. These masks commonly consisted of pretending to be someone else, or appearing to be normal and happy by smiling, complying and people-pleasing to cover up the internal sense of chaos, confusion, devastation and worthlessness. While the distortion of reality and contortion of self allowed some survivors to manage the abuse and hide their true feelings in order to remain connected to the family, it invariably exerted a huge cost through the loss of self-identity and authenticity. The legacy of this for many survivors manifested in distorted perceptions of self and others and a permanent sense of confusion in which nothing made sense, so their hold on reality became even more tenuous.

Sad, bad or normal

It is clear from the narratives that all of the survivors had experienced mental health difficulties at various times in their lives, and that these were often not linked to the abuse by either the survivors themselves or professionals. Nearly all of the survivors had a history of depression, anxiety and a range of trauma reactions such as hyper or hypo-arousal, flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories and dissociative symptoms. Some survivors were diagnosed with PTSD or complex PTSD, while others were diagnosed with a range of psychiatric disorders such as bi-polar

This confusion between love and abuse meant survivors had to grapple with the paradox of knowing that something is wrong yet being told that it is normal, or having to deny that it is abuse to minimise the risk of exposure or the consequences of speaking out

disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), agoraphobia, eating disorders and personality disorders. A number of survivors describe being so shattered by the abuse that they experienced mental and physical breakdowns including recurring periods of suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviour.

To manage the emotional and psychological impact of CSA and overwhelming trauma reactions, many survivors attempted to self-medicate through the use of alcohol, drugs, food, sex or relationships and developed a range of addictions. Some survivors resorted to self-harm through self-injury, lack of self-care, or engaging in self-sabotaging or risky behaviour. Some survivors acted out their internalised sense of badness and self-hatred through behaving badly and feeling invincible, which led some to the fringes of criminal behaviour. In nearly all cases the mental health difficulties, addictions, self-harm and acting out behaviours were often not linked to abuse by professionals, resulting in misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment interventions.

The body keeps the score

Some of the survivors somatised their abuse experience which manifested in a range of unexplained chronic illnesses such as pelvic and genital pain, irritable bowel syndrome and a range of hyper-immune disorders including recurring allergies and skin conditions. A number of survivors suffered from feelings of paralysis, excruciating muscle pain, or intense physical or mental exhaustion commonly associated with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and ME. In addition many survivors suffered from physical symptoms such as insomnia, inability to enjoy sex or lack of pleasure in the body. These symptoms were generally not linked to the abuse by professionals who had little or no awareness of how 'the body keeps the score' when the mind cannot (van der Kolk, 2015).

A life half lived

Many survivors wrote that their lives were not fully lived and that they felt as if a part of the self was missing, lost or broken. A large number of survivors expressed being terrified of people and not being able to trust others, which often led to avoidance and withdrawal from others, self-imposed isolation and unbearable loneliness. Shame and fear meant that they had difficulties socialising, or engaging in or sustaining relationships, as their need for predictability, certainty, control and lack of spontaneity made it difficult to be responsive to care and affection.

Many survivors struggled to accept being loved, despite desperately seeking this.

A number of survivors could only relate through compulsively helping others, putting other people's needs first, or by being compliant. Many survivors were not able to set healthy boundaries or protect themselves which led to either difficult and conflict-ridden relationships, or total avoidance of intimacy, with one client reporting that despite being in her 60s she had never formed any friendships, let alone an intimate relationship. The inability to trust others and terror of intimacy meant that a number of survivors feared having children, which was experienced as a huge loss in later life. A further example of a life half lived shared by a number of survivors was not reaching their full academic and vocational potential, which impacted as a lack of stability in terms of work and career choices.

Scared to be me

An experience common to all survivors was a sense of shame and lack of self-respect alongside overwhelming fear and anxiety, which some described as soul destroying. This, along with the loss of identity, meant that some survivors were scared to be themselves for fear of being seen as vulnerable, worthless, flawed and powerless. These survivors described themselves as being trapped in two emotional worlds, one of anger and the other of shame, which they had to conceal. They describe themselves as being afraid to be themselves, or show their true feelings or needs for fear of hurting others, or being seen as bad or selfish. This meant adopting a mask of invulnerability and being in control as a way to hide their thoughts, feelings and needs.

I was robbed

All the survivors experienced myriad losses, especially the loss of childhood, loss of family, loss of stability and certainty, loss of mental and physical health as well as loss of sense of self. Some survivors mourned the loss of a childhood they didn't have, and the family that wasn't there for them, especially when taken into care or during periods of homelessness. Others felt a sense of loss of the ability to sustain healthy relationships, loss of not having children of their own, loss of educational and vocational opportunities, while those who dissociated from their body mourned the loss of pleasurable bodily sensations, sensuality and sexuality. Nearly all survivors felt robbed of their self-worth, self-respect, self-belief and inner peace and many felt a 'deep, unfathomable pool of regret.'

Seeking help

A common theme to all survivors was their experience when seeking help from professionals such as social workers, GPs or counsellors. Many survivors felt let down and disappointed when first seeking help as many professionals failed to identify the abuse or were unable to link behaviour and symptoms to CSA. In seeking therapeutic help nearly all the survivors were initially referred to generic, short term therapy with counsellors who had little or no understanding of, or specialist training in, CSA. This meant that they were not only misunderstood, but often misdiagnosed, stigmatised, and in some cases over-medicated. As a result most survivors faced years of ineffective therapy which made some feel more vulnerable and damaged, often blaming themselves for the lack of therapeutic success. Many survivors desperately sought therapeutic support innumerable times, with different therapists and types of therapy, in the hope of finding the much needed specialist help.

All of the survivors expressed a sense of relief when they did finally find someone who understood them and made the link to a history of CSA. They all stated that it was only through accessing specialist, long-term therapy and support that they were able to begin the process of recovery and healing. Some survivors found this through one-to-one therapy, while others found it through group therapy, bodywork or psycho-educational awareness groups. Many of the survivors also felt that engaging in The Survivors' Narratives Project and sharing their experiences with other survivors had been extremely helpful. For a summary of what helped see Table 3 (below).

Seeing in colour

Through accessing long-term specialist counselling, group therapy or psycho-educational workshops or having support from other survivors, all the survivors were able to begin the process of recovery and healing, and start the process of post-traumatic growth. Many survivors describe this as feeling as though the 'fog has lifted,' being able to 'see in colour' or 'finding their voice and being able to sing'. For many survivors post-traumatic growth allowed them to break the cycle of abuse, to learn to live in the present more fully and authentically and no longer feel saturated in shame. In finding their voice, especially through this project, many survivors felt released from their prison and ready to embrace life.

An experience common to all survivors was a sense of shame and lack of self-respect alongside overwhelming fear and anxiety, which some described as soul destroying

Table 3 What helped survivors

Disclosure	Being heard, believed and listened to. For some, successfully confronting the abuser.
Family	Support from family, including siblings, and rebuilding relationship with non-abusing parent. For some severing all contact with family members and leaving home country.
Friends and partners	Support from trusted friends and partners who did not judge and in whom survivors could confide.
Professional support	Long-term therapeutic support from counsellors who had specialist training or expertise working with survivors of CSA, were prepared to reach out to and accept the survivor, were experienced in working with trauma symptoms, or willing to work with the whole family. A range of other therapeutic interventions were seen as helpful such as addiction therapy, rehab and the twelve-step programme, alongside group therapy, acupuncture, physiotherapy, bodywork (reiki, homeopathy, herbalism, reflexology and shamanic healing). Professionals who genuinely cared and were able to reach the survivor.
Healing strategies	Grounding techniques, meditation, re-association to the body, regular exercise, forgiveness, reading about abuse, self-help books, personal development workshops, having children, self-awareness, self-love, self-care and having a creative outlet through art and performance, especially music or singing.
Connecting	Connecting with and developing friendships and building a support network with others, including other survivors, to break the silence and alleviate the sense of shame. For some being able to talk to adult children about their own experiences and equip them to break the cycle.

Through these narratives survivors have broken the silence of CSA in the family environment and given voice to their lived experience. They have provided a deeper understanding of what helps survivors, and identified what is needed for the future. To facilitate breaking the silence, and improve recovery and healing from CSA in the future, a number of recommendations were identified by survivors (see Table 4, below). These recommendations are based on the survivors' experiences from childhood, which in some cases was many years ago.

Through these narratives survivors have broken the silence of the terrible taboo of CSA in family environment and given voice to their lived experience

Table 4 Survivors' recommendations

What helped	Examples
For survivors	<p>Increase professional support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater access to specialist therapy for survivors and psycho-education groups • Increase support for survivors of CSA in the family in the criminal justice system • Provide specialist support for survivors in family environment, including opportunities for restorative justice • Encourage people with a history of sexual abuse to get professional support, including speaking to survivors about their experiences • Improve quality of and access to therapy on the NHS for CSA.
Prevention	<p>Prevention via education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it easier for a child/young person to recognise that what happened is wrong, and not their fault and help is available • Include discussion of sexual abuse in the sex education curriculum, providing specialist groups in primary schools to educate children • Provide groups for children who experience sexual abuse, to ensure they receive early support and limit CSA's psychological impact • Develop opportunities for survivors to speak to children about surviving sexual abuse.
Disclosure	<p>Facilitation of disclosure, including support for families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take children who disclose seriously, for reporting and for psychological wellbeing. Not being believed, or disclosure being ignored, erodes the individual's sense of self • Be aware that children who disclose may be at a particular crisis point and it is vital to keep them safe until all facts are established. Family members not involved have sometimes been groomed by abuser(s) and may fail to provide corroboration with the child or keep them safe • Provide support external to the family for children who disclose, recognising the importance of keeping these children safe • Create support network for people who disclose • Provide therapeutic support or psycho-education for non-abusing family members • Increase access to therapeutic support for people who abuse • Create central database for all disclosures.
Professional	<p>Improve professional support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve healthcare professionals' understanding of sexual abuse and knowledge of how to respond to disclosure, and where to refer, including expanding training of counsellors, therapists including cognitive behaviour therapists (CBT) and other professionals • Provide effective long-term NHS counselling for survivors • Involve survivors in developing professional resources and involve specialist sexual abuse agencies in training other relevant professionals • Increase the reach of independent sexual violence advocates (ISVAs) • Recognise the scale and complexity of sexual harm within families • Improve recognition of possible long-term health effects on survivors, including physical health, addictions, self-harm etc.
Public	<p>Improve public understanding and support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate awareness of scale and personal and societal impact of CSA, thereby reducing the burden of 'survivor shame' by improving public perception of survivors • Increase understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse, particularly in the family environment • Recognise non-consensual sexual contact is abuse and can damage.

About the author of the analysis

Christiane Sanderson is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at The University of Roehampton with 25 years' experience of working with survivors of CSA. She is also a consultant and trainer to both statutory and voluntary agencies in CSA, sexual violence, domestic abuse and trauma. She is a Trustee of **One in Four**.

She has written extensively in this area and her most recent publications include *Introduction to Counselling Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma* (2010), *The Warrior Within: A One in Four handbook to aid recovery from childhood sexual abuse and violence* (2010) and *The Spirit Within: A one in four handbook on religious sexual abuse across all faiths* (2011), *Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma: Healing from Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse* (2013) and *Counselling Skills for Working with Shame* (2015).



A new resource from One in Four

This new One in Four pocket-sized publication is an easy to use guide for health care professionals to understand the impact and long-term effects of child sexual abuse.

It also contains guidance for partners, friends and families, explaining in simple to follow language how best to support survivors to recover and heal.

Throughout its six handy tabbed sections, it offers practical advice, guidance and key practice points from how to manage disclosure, identify vulnerabilities, sign posting to specialist care pathways and best practice when working with survivors.

Discover how to order your £6.99 copy by visiting www.oneinfour.org.uk

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One in Four recommendations

Improving management

- Improve awareness and training of health-related professionals to help them manage CSA by recognising it as a underlying factor in many conditions such as substance abuse, eating disorders, mental health and domestic violence
- Encourage health professionals working in areas such as drugs and alcohol dependency, mental health and eating disorders to ask their clients if they have a history of trauma such as CSA, so they can be offered appropriate treatment including referral to specialist sexual abuse agencies, such as **One in Four**
- Improve referral pathways for survivors to ensure they are directed to specialist agencies.
- Provide additional funding so that survivors can access support even if they lack the necessary financial resources
- Involve survivors and survivor organisations in the training of professionals and development of support services
- Recognise the impact of CSA on individuals' health and wellbeing over their life-time and identify how to integrate into NHS health agenda for health and wellbeing.

Improving prevention

- Educate parents and teachers about abuse dynamics including grooming, inappropriate touch and the importance of keeping children safe
- Train professionals to recognise children who may have been/may be experiencing abuse and how to manage disclosure including understanding the complex family dynamics involved
- Train primary school children/young people to be aware about their bodies, emotions, safety, secrecy.

See also **Table 4 Survivors' recommendations** on page 44.

One in Four

For over 15 years One in Four has been working with people who have experienced sexual abuse. Founded in 1999 by Colm O’Gorman, a survivor of clergy abuse, One in Four brings a breadth of expertise to its work in this field and offers a range of interventions.

One in Four is not for profit and is reliant on charitable support. We understand the deep personal and complex impact of sexual abuse and recognise how these traumatic experiences significantly affect people’s lives. Our work focuses on three distinct areas:

- Therapeutic intervention and advocacy for those affected
- Prevention work with children and young people
- Professional development for counsellors and others working with sexual abuse.

Our **therapeutic programme** works with approximately 450 people a year. We offer long-term (a minimum of two years) counselling

based on a relational model that emphasises the importance of the therapeutic relationship and addresses the complex trauma of sexual abuse. We provide therapy groups and psycho-education workshops on experiences common to survivors. Through our **advocacy service** we ensure people who have chosen to report are guided and supported throughout the criminal justice process.

To protect the lives of future generations of children and young people, **One in Four** delivers **prevention work** with children and young people in schools, and provides in-school counselling for children affected. We train and support school staff around disclosure and in working with children who have experienced sexual abuse.

One in Four has an established **professional development** programme delivering training for counsellors and other professionals working with survivors. We provide specialist resources for professionals and survivors on working with and managing the impact of sexual abuse.

One in Four gets its name because it is estimated one in four young people will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18.^{1,2}

Section references

Complexities of definition, methodology and under-reporting create a blurred picture. UK data (2013) finds 19.6% of females, 2.7% of males were victims of a sexual offence from age 16

¹ Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Office of National Statistics (2013), *Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf

A meta-analysis (2009) indicates 19.2% of women, 7.4% of men suffered some form of sexual abuse before age of 18

² Pereda, N, Guilera, G, Forns, M and Gomez-Benito, J (2009). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29 (4), 328-388



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We have 24 hour answerphones and aim to return calls in one day

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