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# **How Adults Tell: Messages for Society and Policy Makers Regarding Disclosure of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

A thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD to the  
National University of Ireland, Galway.

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## **Abstract**

The social work profession in Ireland plays a significant role in the assessment of child sexual abuse referrals. Somewhat unique in an international context, this role encompasses assessment of disclosures by current children who have experienced abuse but also disclosures by adults who have experienced abuse in their childhood. This latter role has remained undefined, un-legislated and under-resourced since its recognition in child protection guidelines in 1999. Anecdotally, the result of such inattention has had devastating effects on those adults who come forward to disclose. This research seeks to explore such concerns by examining how adults tell and addressing the central research question of ‘what is it like for an adult to disclose to child protection services in Ireland?’

This research presents individual voice and lived-experience of adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. It utilises a Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology (BNIM) and is situated in the wider fields of social work and disclosure scholarship. The research examines how the voices and experiences of such adults can be utilised to critically inform the process of disclosing to statutory child protection services in the Republic of Ireland. The research addresses the following aims: (1) What are the facilitators and barriers for adults making disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services in Ireland, (2) How does the current disclosure process within the child protection system and its underlying policies take account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood, and (3) What are the policy recommendations that can inform social work practice in this area?

The research draws upon a framework of theories incorporating ecological systems theory, ethics of care, power, social constructionism and life course theory to present disclosure and effects of abuse as tandem, fluid and life-long processes that practitioners need to be informed about in order to best facilitate those adults who wish to come forward. This framework is informed by the vast literature regarding sexual abuse and disclosure and draws upon the work of Alaggia, Collin-Vézina, McElvaney, Finkelhor, and others in an effort to advance the scholarship in this field. This research reinforces the existing literature in the field demonstrating the everyday and lifelong effects of abuse in childhood and how experiences of disclosure, not only follow a similar life trajectory but, can also echo and replicate the effects of the abuse itself. The research adds to the field by presenting this in an Irish context in respect of a very specific social work policy and practice setting. The research also adds to the field by presenting narratives from individual adults which demonstrate the impact of engaging with a system that is currently not taking adequate account of the dynamics and effects of childhood sexual abuse. Policy and practice recommendations are explored.

## Acknowledgements

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Very special thanks go to the staff at One in Four. One in Four highlighted the issue of adult disclosures to me in 2011 and begun a journey of searching for answers and solutions which has culminated, but not ended, in this research. Particular thanks to Maeve Lewis, Deirdre Kenny and Damien McKenna for their enthusiasm and insight and for acting as gatekeepers in respect of this research. Your hard work was critical to this research getting off the ground.

This research would not exist without the participation of five brave and courageous adults. I cannot thank them enough for their time, patience and energy in meeting with me to share their experiences. This research acts merely as a platform upon which to place their stories, as the narratives they provided firmly speak for themselves. It was a sincere pleasure and privilege to spend time with each and every one of them. Thank you so much for your stories.

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*Dedicated to the memory of Cathal T. Mooney*

*-whose support, love and encouragement underpin this  
work*

*August 28<sup>th</sup> 1945 – August 10<sup>th</sup> 2018*

# Chapter One: Introduction

## Background and Context

Child sexual abuse affects large portions of our society. Ireland's only national sexual abuse prevalence study, Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) showed that one in five women and one in six men have experienced sexual abuse in their childhoods (McGee, Garavan, de Barra, Byrne, and Conroy, 2002, p174). It is a significantly traumatic experience that causes both initial and lifelong effects upon those who experience it. The social work profession in Ireland plays a significant role in the assessment or child sexual abuse referrals. They conduct this role in tandem with An Garda Síochána<sup>1</sup> and other therapeutic and medical services where necessary. This role extends to referrals made in respect of current children who have experienced abuse but also adults who have experienced abuse in their childhood. This latter role however has remained undefined, un-legislated and under-resourced since its recognition in guidelines in 1999. Anecdotally, the result of such inattention has had devastating effects on those adults who come forward to disclose. This research seeks to ground such concerns by examining how adults tell; what is it like for an adult to disclose to child protection services in Ireland?

This research presents individual voice and lived-experience of adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. It is narrative research situated in the wider fields of social work and disclosure scholarship. The presentation within the chapters to follow seeks to replicate a 'storyline' or 'life course' perspective of disclosure with discussion of individual experiences of the adults developing towards examination of interaction with the wider world, namely social work

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<sup>1</sup> An Garda Síochána are the police force within the Republic of Ireland. Other agencies referred to within this work are One in Four (Ireland) which is a therapy and advocacy service in Ireland who work with victims and survivors and also perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse. The State social work child protection services are operated by Tusla which is also known as the Child and Family Agency. This will predominantly be referred to as Tusla throughout.

services, law and policy. The experiences of the adults who have participated in this research hold learnings for social work practice and policy in the Republic Ireland and wider afield.

## Aims and Objectives

The central research question of this study is concerned with exploring *what are adult's experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services?* The study seeks to address the following aims:

- What are the facilitators and barriers for adults making disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services?
- How does the current disclosure process within the child protection system and its underlying policies take account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced child sexual abuse, and
- What are the policy recommendations that can inform social work practice in this area?

In part, this study is prompted by the reports of the Ombudsman's Office in 2010, the Report of the Department of Health and Children and the author's subsequent research (Mooney, 2014, 2017). These works highlighted confusion and lack of effective policy (HIQA, 2015-2017; Office of the Ombudsman, 2017) within social work services in this area. This research seeks to build knowledge surrounding this vastly under-researched issue; focusing on the experiences of those who disclose.

## Personal Positioning

I'm entitling this research project 'How Adults Tell'. My research concerns adults' experiences and while their experiences have been documented and researched in many studies their referrals to social work services and their subsequent treatment by those services have not. So at least there is a niche for this research, it will have some form of novelty, both practically and academically, but none of this hints at or explains why I find myself in this niche. For me to conduct valid, rigorous research in this field I need to be cognisant of the ideas, beliefs and values that I bring with me to this project.

I was born in 1981 to Roman Catholic parents living in the town of New Ross, County Wexford. My father, a National school teacher, and my mother, a housewife, came from religious families and so religion was quite prominent in our household; May alters, Corpus Christi, Sunday mass, Easter sermons etc. I developed a strong curiosity with religion in my younger life, becoming an altar-boy in the local Augustinian Priory. My mother came from the village of Ferns in County Wexford and we visited there most weekends. These visits usually revolved around trips to the church or to a graveyard and so I suppose it is no wonder that my fascination for both religion and history blossomed in my early years. All of this subtly planted cognitive markers in my brain. Words, phrases, imagery, iconography and meanings that flared when associative connections were made in conversations, books, media or adults' conversations that I was exposed to. This is normal process for any brain really, cognitive distortions I believe they are called. An Irish rugby fan for example will spot an Irish jersey a mile off; a person thinking of getting a dog for their home will spot every dog they pass in that same week or month. It's human behaviour.

And so, when the scandal concerning Father Sean Fortune and the Ferns Report broke on South East Radio in our kitchen in New Ross flares went off in all the various points of my brain and lit a skyline of thoughts like the early Christian coastal fires warning of Viking invasion. Words like Ferns, Comisky, New

Ross, Fethard, Church, Catholic, O’Gorman, Fortune and Grennan were fuel to the fires; a local, familiar lexicon that synchronised almost perfectly with my personal cognitive distortions. The brain went into overdrive and began to soak up the information. However, these familiar features were starkly contrasted with new words and imagery; rape, sex, abuse, scandal and paedophile. These were new, unfamiliar concepts being mixed and blended with the familiar. What did all this mean, what were people saying... what had happened?

Once my teenage brain had begun to decipher what it could be that had happened in County Wexford, in the distant and not so distant past, I began to notice the hushed conversations, the torment and confusion and the ultimate beginning of a breakdown in a society and culture that would ultimately never be the same again. Trust had been shattered. I and my brothers were confirmed by Brendan Comisky. The revelations of the Ferns scandal were therefore felt throughout my household. I remember on one occasion, following a piece on the radio about the children who were abused, hearing someone exclaim ‘would those children not have known not to do that’. This line, although stated in complete innocence and confusion about the situation, represented the confusion and attitude of many long believing Irish Catholics at the time but also highlighted to me, in some way, how easily this abuse could have happened and how this abuse of children was ultimately an abuse of power.

I went away to college and life continued for many years, uninterrupted. There were occasional interviews on the radio, documentaries on TV and subsequent abuses and institutions exposed. But these were not to the forefront of my attention. I qualified with a degree in law in Dublin and returned, in a roundabout way, to Wexford to work in a legal firm. This legal firm just so happened to be agents for the Health Service Executive in relation to mental health and child protection and I therefore recommenced my relationship with the subject matter of child abuse and neglect; beginning in our kitchen in New Ross when that news broke, and now in a more professional format.

This was 2005 I was working in Enniscorthy and while child protection concerns were not the main stay of my work they were an aspect that truly interested me. I recall on one occasion having to liaise with a local social worker in relation to an emergency case. It was late into the working day and an emergency care order was required to ensure the safety of two asylum seeking children who were unaccompanied in Wexford town. A court was sitting in Gorey that day. I drafted the relevant proceedings and travelled to the Judge's chambers in Gorey to be sworn in and have the papers signed. The social worker also attended and I duly handed the papers over to him for execution that evening. The urgency and importance of it all thrilled me; the dark evening drive to Gorey to meet the Judge in his chambers, the handover of orders that I had drafted, the ink barely dry. But in a more important sense this work opened my eyes to what was going on, not just on the radio and television, but in my locality. Every case I dealt with, by a feature of being a Wexford firm, was in my locality. I saw it all, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, malnourishment, elder abuse, domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction and whole-sale family, and ultimately community, breakdown. But I saw it all at such a remove and through such a lens that allowed me to gaze longer and more intently. I wasn't in the houses, meeting the families, putting the children in my car to remove them to safety; as I am now. I saw it all in emails, case files, court briefs, legislation, policy and law. 2005 is also significant in that it was the year that the ferns report was published, the year Brendan Comisky was approached with a camera on the steps of his house and the year Colm O'Gorman became a household name. All local, all familiar.

So why am I writing this and what does it mean for my research? I was male growing up in Wexford, went to a Christian Brother school and was an altar boy. I served many masses on my own, just me and the priest getting ready in the sacristy. I received phone calls from a local priest pleading with me to return to serve mass when I finally chose to move on to something else. I walked to school past the rental accommodation where Sean Fortune lived and subsequently ended his own life prior to standing trial for his crimes. I took

swimming lessons at a local pool from second class onwards where my swim coach was charged and convicted of abusing boys of my age. I had, and still have, two loving parents, who like so many other parents, trusted these institutions and people... and they had no reason not to.

The research tells us that stigma is a huge issue and potential daily component of the life of a person who has experienced childhood sexual abuse. However, stigma is a social construction. It is a feature that has been created in reaction to societal beliefs. At some point the predominant thinking within society was that these people are bad they should be ashamed. This has as much to do with catholic Ireland and its black and white view of social issues as it does about sexual issues in general and public conversations of same. Hence it has taken years and decades for some adults to come forward and disclose their abuse. While others sadly never come forward and other still even go so far as to remove themselves from the equation altogether. However, those affected are not some homogeneous group with similar experiences and ways of dealing with them. Even the term *survivor* is up for question. How dare I refer to someone, who struggles every day of their life, as a *survivor*? How dare I assume, that just because someone has been abused, that they are a *victim*? Every individual who participates must be held as expert, albeit in their own life experience. One must not be allowed to speak for another. The research is fundamentally about individual voice. And it is my role to merely build a frame and present that voice.

## Theoretical Foundation

This research is built upon a social constructionist epistemological base. While acknowledging other perspectives, it assumes that knowledge and experience is socially, culturally, historically and politically mediated and this perspective is

carried through the thesis in respect of setting context, review of the relevant literature and collecting, analysing and presenting the findings.

The research also places significant emphasis on the roles of power, ethics of care and life-course and ecological perspectives. While many of these theories and perspectives have been used to examine child sexual abuse and disclosure in the past it is argued here that this research significantly contributes to theory in this field by presenting a theoretical framework to explore the experience of disclosure.

## Research Design and Methods

The research concept, issues regarding social work assessment of retrospective disclosures, was originally introduced to the researcher by the organisation One in Four. The researcher conducted a master's thesis on the subject, completed in 2013, which examined social worker, advocacy and policy professionals' experience of working with adult disclosures. The findings of this MA study highlighted concerns by social workers and advocacy workers regarding re-traumatisation of adults due to poor guidance or practice policy. The central limitation of this MA study was the absence of the voice of the adults themselves and this inspired the current study. The overall design of this project, guided and supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor, was also influenced by similar work at McGill University, Montreal. The author spent time there in 2014 designing this project. Placing significant importance on individual voice and lived-experience this research was conducted using a Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology. This approach uses a free-narrative style of data collection and hands a majority of 'control' or 'power' to the participant. It is therefore viewed as being particularly apt for this project.

## A Note on Terminology

An issue which arose during conversations and discussions with both McGill University and the University of New Hampshire surrounded the use of the terminology to describe the participants. The dominant theme within the fields of counselling and psychotherapy is to use the term ‘survivor’ to denote not only the occurrence of a traumatic event but also to attribute strength and resilience to the individual who has had such an experience (Kelly, 1988; Sanderson, 2006). As a corollary to this much of contemporary feminist literature on the issue of sexual assault and abuse tends to view the term ‘victim’ in terms of powerlessness and lack of agency (Convery, 2006). Hunter (2010) interrogates the evolving narratives of both terms suggesting, in agreement with Convery, that the victim discourse began with feminists and system theorists in the 1960s and 70s in an effort to have child sexual abuse recognised as a crime. Hunter argues that the benefit of the victim discourse was its effort to encourage people to speak about their experiences of abuse. Hunter goes on to suggest that in the 80s the dominant ‘survivor’ discourse emerged focussing on ‘strength, courage and resilience’ (2010, p177). While still prevalent in use, she notes that the ‘survivor discourse has also been described as potentially stigmatising because it links the identity of the survivor to their childhood abuse (Phillips and Daniluk, 2004; Warner, 2003)’ (2010, p177).

The issue with both identifying terms is that they represent two distinct but related socially constructed discourses which have attributed these labels to a broad spectrum of individuals from cancer patients to individuals who have experienced sexual abuse and violence. The ethos of this research is centred on the individual voice of the adult who has experienced childhood sexual abuse, their experiences of disclosure to social work services in their own words. It is the author’s preference that each individual participant use their own identifying terminology, or none at all, so that neither the author nor the

research itself as an entity prescribes an identity to an individual participant. However, to describe the research sample in a general sense the author ascribes the term ‘adults who have experienced abuse in their childhood’ throughout the following text.

## Thesis Outline

This chapter introduces the general aims, underpinnings and rationale for the research and provides the reader with a basic map of what is to follow. It has discussed the rationale, personal and theoretical underpinning, issues regarding language and terminology throughout and a brief overview of the research design. A more substantial grounding and background is provided in Chapter Two, Context. This chapter examines the history of both child protection and child protection guidelines in Ireland. The chapter begins a discussion of social constructionism by exploring the ‘emergence and regression’ of child sexual abuse and moves toward defining adult retrospective disclosures of abuse and the current policy context regarding such disclosures.

Chapter Three begins by setting out the relevant literature in respect of child sexual abuse and its prevalence. The chapter then moves to examine how people disclose, if they disclose and what the dynamics and effects of this experience are following an experience of abuse. The chapter concludes with an examination of what it is like for individuals to engage with professional services in respect to disclosure.

Chapter Four discusses the various theories chosen to explore the central research question. A framework, based upon Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, is presented as a mechanism upon which to hang the various theories being discussed. The framework theorises a life course perspective on disclosure and abuse, integrating theories of power, ethics of care, social constructionism within the layers of a socio-ecological model. The framework

seeks to reinforce the ‘storyline’ of abuse and disclosure which many adults experience, beginning with their social constructed environment, to the power dynamics at play within it, how this affects interactions with services and ultimately where this sits in the wider ecology and chronology.

Chapter Five presents the methodology used in this research and reiterates the rationale and aims and objectives of the study, its positioning within the wider field of social work and disclosure scholarship and how the question raised was addressed using BNIM data collection and analysis and a wider thematic analysis methodology.

Chapters Six sets out the substantive findings of the research resulting from a thematic analysis process. The main themes presented, with further sub-themes identified in each, are The Adult, Disclosure, Interaction, Information, Social Work and Reflection. In keeping with the theoretical underpinnings, each theme and sub-theme are presented within an ecological framework, similar to research previously presented by Alaggia (2005). This chapter concludes by presenting narratives of particular incidents shared by the five participants which are representative of the central research question and general findings and constitute Particular Incident Narratives or PINs as called in the BNIM methodology.

Chapter Seven presents a detailed discussion of the findings with reference to key literature in the area. The discussion chapter follows the central objectives of the research and presents the discussion in terms of the facilitators and barriers to disclosure, if and how the current system takes account of the specific needs of individuals who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and policy and practice recommendations emerging from the research.

Chapter Eight concludes the research with a summation of the rationale, process and key learnings from the research.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter sets out an overview of what is to follow. Having established the research area and general approach being assumed in this research it is now important to begin to set the contextual background to the study and move towards justifying the central research question in the subsequent literature review.

## **Chapter Two: Context**

### Introduction

This chapter details the context of the research and is presented in three main sections. The first of these explores the development of the child protection system in Ireland; a system that is ultimately tasked with receiving and assessing both child and adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse. This section charts the progression of child protection services from their beginnings in charitable Victorian societies, to the development of the Children Act 1908, to the establishment of national Health Boards and our current child protection system under the Child Care Act 1991. Finally, the transfer of all child protection functions of the State to the newly established Child and Family Agency, Tusla, will be discussed.

The second section of this chapter refines its focus on the development of specific child protection guidelines in Ireland. This section explores the first mention of child sexual abuse in guidelines in 1987 and the defining of social workers' role in respect of adult disclosures in the Children First national guidelines in 1999, later revised in 2011 and 2017.

The final section, drawing upon the social constructionist approach adopted in this research, highlights how our knowledge and, more importantly, awareness of childhood sexual abuse has been historically and culturally mediated. This section seeks to provide a picture of the origins of the potential barriers that current adults face when disclosing childhood abuse. The section begins by picking up on the Victorian attitudes to child abuse as introduced in the opening section of the chapter. The section then examines the element of taboo and wider societal attitudes to child sexual abuse through time with specific examples highlighted from works of Olafson et al (1993) and Lalor (1998).

This chapter then concludes with a summary which leads in to the subsequent discussion of the key literature relevant to this research in Chapter 3.

## History of the Child Protection System in Ireland

Child protection as a value as opposed to a specific service has a long and chequered history in the Irish State. This section explores the development of our current child protection system in Ireland which is tasked with the role of receiving and assessing both adult and child reports of childhood sexual abuse. To this day adult or 'retrospective' disclosures have received far less attention and focus than those received in respect of children. This section discusses the development of this system from an ad hoc, charitable based system focussing mainly on the poor and those viewed as morally destitute; to a system dominated by policy documents and systematic approaches to the protection of children with varying results in relation to practice on the ground. From this chapter we see how child protection policy development in Ireland has largely been a reactionary and historically mediated phenomenon. Ferguson (2004) proffers the view that to make sense of how children have been protected throughout history one must be cognisant of the relationships between social practices of the time, concepts of risk, childhood and, for the purposes of this thesis, concepts of child sexual abuse (a history of which will be discussed later in this chapter), and the various resources and technologies available to enable children to be protected in practice at a given point in history (Ferguson, 2004).

Prior to the 1800's the social conception and subsequent regulation of child cruelty was minimal. Based on a systematic review of newspapers from the late 1800's Ferguson establishes that no more than a handful of child cruelty cases came before the courts (Ferguson, 2004). As will be discussed below, with the establishment of societies for the prevention of cruelty to children the social conception of child abuse and sexual abuse against children further developed and became more commonplace. The work of these societies led to the

development of ‘new forms of social regulation and expertise which began to reconstitute the meanings of child maltreatment and relations between the state, parents, children and civil society’ (Ferguson, 2004, p26).

It was the Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of Children, Act 1889, applied in England, Wales and Ireland, which created new offences of child cruelty and allowed for children to be removed from their homes to Children’s Shelters run by the various Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCCs) (Ferguson, 2004; Skehill, 2004). During these ‘Shelter Years’, as called by Ferguson (2004), from 1892-1903, 69 per cent of cases were classified as neglect while 1.7 per cent of cases fell under the category of ‘immorality’ which included sexual offences (Ferguson, 2004). It is argued that these shelters provided an environment whereby abuse within the home, which ordinarily may never have come to the attention of the authorities, was beginning to be disclosed by child victims. Ferguson, referencing the Stockton and Thornaby Society’s Annual Report (1893), states that ‘children’s disclosures had shifted from the courtroom to institutions like the shelters... Space and time had been created for (abused) children which was built around professional mediation’ (Ferguson, 2004, p35). Ferguson argues that it was at this time that the modern conception of child abuse was beginning to form within society. Here Ferguson is presenting the changing nature of knowledge surrounding abuse and harm to children at the time and in doing so makes specific reference to the value of the ‘space and time’ in allowing those abused to bring their experiences to light. This is significant in terms of the author’s thesis in that it is not only a historical reference to the awareness and existence of child sexual abuse but also a reference to the significance of the point, or environment, of disclosure in terms of the provision of appropriate time and space.

During this period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, child protection and welfare in Ireland focused primarily on the physical and, more specifically, moral health and wellbeing of the child and dealt primarily with poor, homeless and orphaned

children. McGuinness writes that ‘early moves to protect vulnerable children were in the main inspired by Church authorities, both Catholic and Protestant’ (McGuinness, 2012, p48). One of the initial methods by which children were ‘kept safe’ in the Irish State was the placement of children into residential care. From the early 1820’s residential care was governed by various religious denominations in Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant. It was not until 1858 following the enactment of the Reformatory School (Ireland) Act that other groups and entities could organise for the care of children (Buckley, Skehill, O’Sullivan 1997, p3).

The Poor Relief (Ireland) Act, 1838, provided for the establishment of workhouses and it was within Section 9 of the later 1862 Act of the same name that provided for children to be removed from such workhouses should a workhouse not be suited to the ‘...care and nurturing of such children during infancy...’ (Buckley et al, 1997) and placed in foster care which was known as ‘boarding out’ (Skehill, 2004). Catherine McGuinness, providing a synopsis of the history of Irish child protection in an article concerning the Kilkenny Incest Case, stated that ‘by 1899 seventy-one industrial schools had been established in Ireland, with 8,422 inmates; but 5,988 children still remained in workhouses’ (McGuinness, 2012, p48). Therefore, while policy and law provided for ‘care and nurturing’ as a requirement and options for ‘boarding out’ with foster guardians, a vast number of children remained in dire circumstances; again, marking a distinction between policy and practice which becomes a recurring theme within the field of child protection in Ireland.

Moving towards the beginning of the Twentieth century, 1889 saw the establishment of the first Irish branch of the NSPCC, under the auspices of the Dublin Aid Committee (Buckley, 2013). At the time of its inception, this branch was the ‘principal child protection agency operating in Ireland’ (Buckley, 2013, p47). Buckley suggests that this development also saw the move from a ‘reform and relief’ system of child protection which involved the operation of shelters and orphanages to a legislative based system where these

societies sought to exact change within family homes by use of legislation (2013, p47). She notes that:

there was a shift in child welfare reform from a concern over the rescue and reclamation of children through philanthropy to the active involvement of philanthropists and the State in moulding children and families through education, social and health work.

(Buckley, 2013, p47).

The primary legislation governing the area of child care services in Ireland and the United Kingdom arrived with the enactment of the Children Act, 1908. ‘This Act consolidated the mass of legislation which had regulated the treatment and provision of services for children since the middle of the nineteenth century’ (Buckley et al, 1997, p5). ‘At the time of its introduction this was seen as a progressive and enlightened measure, and was known as the Children’s Charter’ (McGuinness, 2012, p48). This Act remained the central policy document in relation to the regulation of services and care for children within the state until the enactment of the Child Care Act, 1991.

For the best part of a century, and from the foundation of the independent Irish State in 1992 until the middle of the 1990’s, the 1908 Children Act remained the central statutory basis both for the criminal law concerning child offenders and for the protection of deprived and vulnerable children.

(McGuinness, 2012, p49)

From the establishment of the Irish State in 1922 support services to families and children, including industrial and reformatory schools and laundries were primarily provided by Church groups, predominantly Catholic, which viewed the family as a sacred institution deserving protection from State interference.

While protection services were still operated largely by the ISPC (Buckley, 2013; Devaney and McGregor, 2016). The Irish Constitution, introduced in 1937, saw the introduction of a specific Article concerning the family. This Article was heavily influenced by the views of Pope Leo XIII. ‘The pope argued against the contention that the State had the option to intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household; he called this “a great and pernicious error”’ (Keogh and McCarthy, 2007, p113). It has been argued that such views and policies introduced a ‘minimalist approach’ to intervention in the family setting within child protection and welfare discourse in Ireland (Skehill, 2003; Devaney and McGregor, 2016).

In the 1970s the influential Kennedy Report (1970), which was commissioned to review the operation of reformatory and industrial schools in Ireland, ‘was instrumental in highlighting the unrealistic nature of dealing with children-in-care in isolation, with a strong emphasis on preventing children from being placed in care’ (Devaney and McGregor, 2016, p4). O’Sullivan (2009) suggests that this led to a perspective shift in child protection and welfare discourse ‘from punitive to caring, from controlling to understanding, from custodial to educative...’ (2009, p. 310). Despite this ‘culture shift’ due to the static nature of child welfare policy prior to the enactment of the Child Care Act 1991 the ‘child protection and welfare system in Ireland remained relatively underdeveloped’ (Skehill, 2004, p11). The Health Act, 1970 established eight regional health boards within the State and entrusted them with responsibility for the care and welfare of children under the remit of ‘community welfare services’ (National Economic and Social Council, 1987). These health boards in turn directly hired social workers to have ‘primary responsibility for the provision of child welfare services’ (Buckley et al, 1997, p10) which included child protection services. Therefore, from the mid-seventies onwards the child care role of the health boards began to become more prominent.

In 1980 the Taskforce on Child Care Services produced a report which bolstered the argument for new legislation in the area of child protection and

welfare. Devaney and McGregor highlight that one of the key components of this report was the ‘emphasis which the Report placed on training of [then] child care workers [now social care workers] with a recommendation that training includes not only working with children but also with their families and the local community’ (2016, p5). Due to the lack of appropriate legislation during this period, ‘considerable legal ingenuity was brought to bear in using marginally relevant sections of the 1908 Act... to place children in care’ (McGuinness, 2012, p49). McGuinness goes on to note that in the Supreme Court case of *State (D and D) v. Groarke* [1990] the court finally arbitrated on this use of ‘legal ingenuity’ by ruling that the health boards had no statutory powers to take children in to care and act as ‘fit persons’ under the law. The reactive nature of policy in this area was again exposed when the Children Act 1989 was commenced to deal with the above situation. This Act was signed into law on the 9th of November 1989 less than four months after the case of *State (D and D) v. G* was decided.

The landscape of Irish child protection practice changed dramatically and was modernised in 1995 with the commencement of the Child Care Act 1991 (See Ferguson and Kenny, 1995; Gilligan IN Hill and Aldgate, 1996). The Act governs the Tusla’s (formerly HSE and Health Boards) role in relation to the protection and welfare of children in the State and was defined, on July 10th, 1991, to be ‘An Act to provide for the care and protection of children and for related matters’ (1991). The duties under this Act were transferred to the new Child and Family Agency, or Tusla, under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013. Tusla began its work in January 2014 and is Ireland’s first stand-alone State child protection and welfare service. The development followed in large part from the establishment of a dedicated Government Department and Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs, introduced in June 2011. Both developments saw the provision and regulation of child protection and welfare services delivered separately from main-stream health services in Ireland (Devaney and McGregor, 2016).

The Child Care Act, 1991, under Section 3 specifically entrusts Tusla with the care and welfare of children and provides that it shall be its function ‘to promote the welfare of children in its area who are not receiving adequate care and protection’ (1991). Section 3 of this Act requires Tusla to ‘take positive steps to identify children who are not receiving adequate care and protection’ (Nestor, 2016, p116) and is a pro-active, as opposed to reactive, duty to protect. Nestor (2016) notes that this pro-active nature of the provision reflects Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requiring States to take all measures to protect children from maltreatment (2016, p117). Article 34 of the UNCRC also lays down obligations upon member States to protect children specifically from sexual abuse and exploitation and this is replicated within EU law under the Lanzarote Convention, to which Ireland is a signatory but is one of a small number of States that has not ratified. The Child Care Act and specifically Section 3 remains the legislative cornerstone for child protection and welfare services in Ireland to the present day (Ward, 2005; Ferguson and Kenny, 1995; Shannon, 2010) and community care social workers remain the frontline workers within this area (Skehill, 2004).

## Development of Irish Child Protection guidelines

### *Irish Child Protection Guidelines 1987*

It is now appropriate to focus specifically on the development of both Government and Tusla/HSE/Health Board policies in relation to child protection from the establishment of the Health Boards in the 1970’s under the Health Act, 1970, to the present day. It is important to explore these to understand the development of policy relating to retrospective abuse allegations. Despite child protection systems being in place in some form since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the focus on sexual abuse has been limited due to lack of societal acceptance of such a phenomenon but also due to Irish cultural and

historical attitudes towards sexuality, morality and the family, as discussed above. Up until the mid-nineteen eighties child protection policy in Ireland centred largely on the area of non-accidental injury. The Department of Health's Committee on Non-Accidental Injury published its report in 1976 'and this represented the basis for all subsequent guidelines issued by the Department of Health' (Buckley et al, 1997, p13). This coincides with, and was influenced by, the contemporary American awareness of child abuse. In the nineteen sixties Henry Kempe published his formative article relating to non-accidental injury and sparked the 're-discovery' or awareness of child abuse (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegmueller and Silver, 1962). This awakening of awareness was followed by the publication of modern prevalence statistics beginning with the work of Finkelhor in the late 1970's. The defining of child abuse in terms of non-accidental injury gradually dissolved leaving a specific category of child sexual abuse.

McKeown and Gilligan (1990) suggest that 'the first indication of professional concern with CSA in Ireland can probably be traced to a multi-disciplinary seminar on incest organised by the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) in January 1983 (1990, p4). They go on to state that prior to this little attention was paid to the area. During a Taskforce on childcare services in 1981, the same authors proposed the inclusion of child sexual abuse as grounds for State intervention to protect children (Taskforce on Child Care Services, 1981, p344). It was 1987 when the first Irish health board policy document to move away from child abuse being defined exclusively under the area of non-accidental injury was published and was entitled 'Child Abuse Guidelines' (Department of Health, 1987). This document also highlighted the 'importance of inter-agency and inter-professional work' and it went so far as to outline the 'roles and responsibilities of all professionals in the child protection network' (Buckley et al, 1997; See also: Burns and Lynch, 2012; Skehill, 2004; Buckley, 2002). This 1987 document was also the first set of guidelines which referred to sexual abuse. However, as highlighted by the Office of Ombudsman for Children (2010), these guidelines did not go so far as to discuss the area of retrospective

disclosures of abuse (2010, p89). ‘Child protection policy making in Ireland has tended to follow high profile happenings in a political, piecemeal fashion and the Report of the Kilkenny Incest Investigation provided the catalyst needed to progress the child care services’ in Ireland (McGrath, 1996 as cited in Buckley et al, 1997, p20). Skehill writing in 2004 references Lavan to further emphasise this point relating to the Kilkenny Case when she quotes that ‘it was not calculations by academics or indeed the long-standing child care lobby, which spurred the government into providing more resources and speeding up the implementation of the Act’ (Lavan, 1998 cited in Skehill, 2004, p11).

As discussed above, following this key report a number of subsequent child abuse investigations were conducted including Kelly: A Child is Dead, 1996 (Joint Committee on the Family, 1996), the Report on the Inquiry into the Operation of Madonna House (Department of Health, 1996b), the Ryan Report (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009) as well as the numerous other inquiries relating to familial, extra-familial and clerical abuse in religious and State institutions in more recent times (See Buckley and Nolan, 2013; Holohan, 2011; See Appendix 1). Buckley and Nolan (2013) conducting a review of such inquiries found common themes emerged from them such as a lack of vigilance in respect of child abuse, need for better inter-agency cooperation, record keeping and exchange of information and ultimately a consistent call for guidance in respect of managing and accessing allegations of child abuse (2013). Specifically, reviewing inquiries relating to clerical abuse, Holohan’s (2011) extensive review highlighted that a ‘deferential attitude’ toward the Church by State agencies along with a lack of clarity surrounding roles, responsibilities and legal powers ‘further served to minimise accountability and responsibility with respect to abused children’ (2011, p31). It was investigations and reports such as these that firmly brought child protection policy to the forefront of Irish political debate and concern (Kilkelly, 2008). ‘However, subsequent inquiries also reinforced a major policy and practice concern about the inadequacy of the Irish child welfare system in protecting children at risk’ (Devaney and McGregor, 2016, p5). Many of these reports,

from The Kilkenny Incest Case in 1993 onwards, offer wide ranging recommendations in relation to the specific situations being investigated and in relation to child protection in general. Some of these recommendations have been taken on board in subsequent child protection policies while others remain to be implemented. Buckley and Nolan (2013) warned that the proliferation of child abuse inquiries in Ireland could have the effect of leading to a ‘systems-overload’ within child protection services and what they termed ‘recommendation-fatigue’, relating to repeated and predictable recommendations being made in such reports (2013). While a deeper discussion of these cases does not fall within the remit of this research, they do serve to highlight Ireland’s long-standing relationship with child abuse and neglect, and the many opportunities that Ireland has had to learn and develop. Throughout these cases, ranging from 1914 to the present day, child sexual abuse has never been acceptable and has never been condoned by Irish society at any stage in our past. Despite this legacy of abuse and our outward intolerance toward it, child abuse and neglect remain a prime concern within this country and within our society.

In May 1999 the Prime Minister of Ireland made a public apology to victims of abuse in Ireland and, while not a direct consequence, what followed was the establishment of a Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Commission, 2009), the establishment of a redress board for survivors of abuse in State-run institutions, (originally the Residential Institutions Redress Board now known as Caranua), the introduction of a national vetting bureau, draft sex offenders monitoring legislation and mandatory reporting legislation which was enacted in 2015 and commenced in 2017 (Children First Act 2015) (Nestor, 2016).

#### *Children First National Guidelines 1999*

Following these reports, focus on child protection services and policy was afforded attention in Department of Health documents such as Putting Children

First: Discussion Document on Mandatory Reporting (Department of Health and Children, 1996a), Putting Children First: Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Children (Department of Health, 1997) and Notification of Suspected Cases of Child Abuse Between Health Boards and Gardaí (Department of Health, 1995). The culmination of these policies eventually arrived in 1999 with the introduction of national guidance in child protection, entitled *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health, 1999).

‘A key finding of the [Children First] Working Group’s deliberations was the significant variation in how organisations operate child protection procedures and arrangements’ (Ibid, 1999, p12). Children First, 1999 was heralded as a model of how to consistently apply procedures across the Health Boards and included the first specific reference to Retrospective Disclosures of Abuse and how to deal with them, at Section 4.6 (Ibid, 1999, p 39). In 2008 however, the National Review of Compliance with Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, 2008) highlighted that this lack of uniformity in practice across the Health Boards and a lack of consistent implementation of child protection standards remained. The review stated that ‘the HSE itself has acknowledged that the lack of uniformity across the former Health Boards militated against the effective implementation of the Children First guidelines’ (Ibid, 2008, p13).

This lack of uniformity or ‘variable practice’ was again highlighted by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, two years later, in their 2010 report; A report based on an investigation into the implementation of Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Ombudsman for Children, 2010). From the very outset of this report the Ombudsman highlights in her foreword that some of the problems included ‘variable practice, a lack of internal scrutiny, a failure to get different agencies working together’ and noted that these all pointed to ‘a need for a change of culture and attitude’ (Ibid, 2010, p i).

In direct relevance to this research, and as mentioned above, the Ombudsman's report specifically identified the fact that the '1987 Guidelines did not cover historic cases of abuse' and flagged this as 'a significant omission because those who have abused in the past may also pose a present risk to children' (Ibid, 2010, p7). The Ombudsman's report is a critical evaluation of the child protection policy that was in place at that time and it highlighted inconsistency and variation in practice across the State in the area of child protection in general and in the specific area of the handling of referrals and reporting. It is therefore an important piece of literature in respect of retrospective disclosures.

#### *Revised Children First National Guidelines 2011*

As noted previously, McGrath (1996) and Lavan (1998) amongst others highlighted the tendency for Ireland's child protection policy to follow on from high profile happenings and this was no more evident than in 2011 when a newly revised edition of Children First followed on foot of the publication of the report into clerical abuse in the diocese of Cloyne in County Cork (Commission of Investigation (Cloyne Report), 2010). The interesting aspect of the Cloyne Report, from a child protection policy point of view, is the fact that the investigation covered a period from January 1996 to February 2009. This was a period where child protection had been brought to the forefront of political debate and had undergone major restructuring in the form of Church guidelines, Children First, 1999 and its subsequent review in 2008. Despite this Cloyne details blatant disregard of child protection policy and guidelines. Holohan (2011) notes that at that time:

...the Church's own procedures were supposed to be in place, and the so-called 'learning curve' which Church authorities had previously used to explain very poor handling of complaints in other dioceses had no relevance in these cases.

(Holohan, 2011, p 34)

The resultant publication of Children First, 2011, was again heralded, this time by Minister of the new Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald, as a document which did not;

...create simply a reporting culture and nothing else because protecting children involves more than making a once-off report. Instead, through requiring statutory compliance with Children First, I propose a much broader-based and comprehensive approach to child protection...

(Fitzgerald, Dáil (Irish Parliament) Speech, 20th July 2011).

Children First 2011, sought to directly deal with the issue of inconsistent application of policy and variable practice by stating from its outset that ‘this edition of Children First supersedes all others and should be the only one in use’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p iii) and also that it is the intention of government to place Children First 2011 on a statutory footing so that ‘all people who are working with children will have a statutory duty to comply with the Children First: National Guidance’ (Ibid, 2011, p ix). After a protracted period of debate and delay, the Children First Act 2015 was enacted on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The Act covers four key areas including the requirement for services working with children to have Child Safeguarding Statements (Part 2); the provision for Mandatory Reporting by listed professionals (Part 3); details of inter-departmental implementation plans (Part 4) and a series of schedules detailing the relevant services effected, the professionals mandated to report and a definition of child sexual abuse incorporating all previous legislative definitions regarding sexual crimes against children. Mandatory reporting of information regarding child abuse and neglect come in to force in Irish law on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and was accompanied by a newly revised version of Children First (Department of

Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) and suite of supporting documents regarding reporting of abuse, joint-working between State police and child protection services and the operation of safeguarding statements which do not fall under the remit of this research. Children First 2017's section in respect of retrospective disclosures is vastly reduced compared to its predecessors and will be discussed later in this chapter in the section entitled, *Adult Disclosures: Social Work Policy and Practice*.

### Emergence and Regression of our awareness of Child Sexual Abuse

Knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse has a long history of regression and emergence within the public consciousness (Olafson et al, 1993). Taking note of media coverage, judicial pronouncements and political concern, it is easy for society and research to form the mistaken belief that child sexual abuse is a recent phenomenon. In an Irish context, it has also been easy for us as a nation to link child sexual abuse almost exclusively with the Catholic Church given the levels of media and public attention (e.g. Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse) even though evidence confirms that much of child sexual abuse occurs either within the immediate nuclear family or within wider extended family structures (McGee, et al, 2002 and 2005; Douglas and Finkelhor, 2005).

Added to this is the context of taboo surrounding child sexual abuse and sex and family life in Ireland in general. Ireland's interaction with the issue of child sexual abuse developed through a very specific environment of repression and silence. Buckley (2013) notes that 'as late as 1885, incest was spoken of euphemistically in medical journals as 'things done in secret''(p153) and that this euphemism or silence continued in Ireland until the 1970s. O'Sullivan also highlights this issue with the Irish discourse surrounding sexual abuse. He provides examples of knowledge of sexual abuse within reformatories in the

1970's not being reported by those who ran the institutions because 'child sexual abuse' had not been "coined" or in use as a term by child care professional. He also cites Fergusson who, when discussing the 'West of Ireland Farmer Case' (concerning intra-familial sexual abuse, 1998) stated that it unfortunately 'spanned a period when our understanding of serious physical and sexual violence was only beginning to develop' (Fergusson, 1998 cited in O'Sullivan, 2002). Despite this O'Sullivan (2002) goes on to highlight that in contrast to these sentiments while the 'term "child sexual abuse" was not utilised, it was clear that a range of euphemisms for child sexual abuse was evident' (2002, p198). This is further emphasised later in this section when the emergence and regression of societal awareness of child sexual abuse is examined.

Such mistaken beliefs have led to a form of denial regarding the prevalence, context, impact and effects of child sexual abuse within society and they have also led to our knowledge of child sexual abuse being constructed in a specific way. Olafson, Corwin and Summit writing about the modern history of child sexual abuse awareness in 1993 noted that there has been a 'long history of denial about criminal sexual behaviour against children' and that 'as a society, we behave somewhat like those victims who protect themselves from their pain and terror by splitting off and sealing over all memory of childhood sexual trauma (Goodwin, 1985; Summit, 1988 cited in Olafson et al., 1993, p8). Much of this denial was aided by the many misconceptions which informed the knowledge that surrounded sexual abuse of children throughout the last two centuries. For example, Simpson (1988) commented that 'in 18th Century London, many believed that sexual congress with a child would cure venereal disease, and 25% of capital rape prosecutions at the Old Bailey between 1730 and 1789 involved victims younger than 10' (Simpson, 1988 IN Olafson et al 1993, p8).

Further to this, Victorian commentators tended to only write about child abuse in terms of incest and it was very much viewed as a phenomenon of lower class

families. Olafson et al., referencing Jeffreys (1987); Villermé (1840, 1850) and; Wohl (1978) suggest that ‘most Victorians who wrote about incest linked it to poverty, overcrowding and the promiscuous habits of the poor’ (1993, p8). Buckley also notes the perceived link at that time between ‘child abuse, poverty and a person’s moral character’ (2013, p55) and the offence of incest historically being an ecclesiastical and not criminal offence and therefore seen as primarily a moral transgression (2013, p153). The Punishment of Incest Act 1908 outlawed carnal knowledge or rape of a daughter or sister but the offence remained a misdemeanour and was tried *in camera* leading to significant barriers to prosecution. Despite legislation being updated in the United Kingdom the offence of Incest remained a misdemeanour in Ireland until 1995. Buckley (2013) attributes this to Irish attitudes towards sexuality, morality and the role of the family in Irish Society, all influenced significantly by the teachings of the Catholic Church. These were the dominant discourses and knowledges within the field at the time and they shaped public opinion, research and, ultimately, policy in relation to child sexual abuse and its surrounding issues. Collin Vézina et al note that ‘although the taboo of CSA might not be as prominent as a few decades ago when it was rarely spoken of, veiled issues still prevent victims from reaching out to authorities to reveal the abuse they suffer’ (Collin-Vézina, De La Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer and Milne, 2015, p131).

In continuing this trend of viewing child sexual abuse as a class issue many of the 19th Century societies (SPCCs) which formed to protect children from cruelty and harm tended to work with ‘immigrant poor and working-class families (Olafson et al, 1993, p9). Olafson et al., go on to point out the significant role of certain groups in shifting this perception:

A group of late 19th-century British and American feminists, churchmen, and sex reformers cut through class biases about incest and argued that “these shocking crimes” occur in all social classes (Jeffreys, 1987, p. 277). In Great Britain, they were influential in raising the age of

consent from 10 to 13 in 1875 and to 16 in 1885, and in criminalizing incest in 1908 (Simpson, 1988; Walkowitz, 1980). They campaigned with less success to increase the severity of sentences for sexual assaults on female children; assaults on boys and even petty theft entailed longer jail terms than did assaults on girls. Some of their other goals, such as their crusade against marital rape, sound strikingly modern (Gordon, 1988; Jeffreys, 1985).

(Olafson et al, 1993, p9).

It is clear from the above that knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse throughout history was dependent and shaped by the dominant discourses of a particular time; whether they be morally, culturally or politically mediated. Due to this the author adopts a social constructionist approach to this research, acknowledging the assumption that knowledge is socially, historically and politically mediated and constructed. This presents the difficult problem of establishing 'truth' with the field of child sexual abuse (this will be discussed further in a dedicated theory chapter, Chapter Four). It is these socially constructed perceptions of child abuse that lead to the creation of certain knowledges and discourses about children and abuse, about child abusers and about child abuse itself. It is important, if not imperative, for researchers in this field to be aware of how these knowledges were created and how dominant discourses have the power to shape knowledge and interpretation of a given matter. The above literature, Olafson (1993) in particular, led the author to the work of Jeffrey Masson (1992) who provides a very relevant case example of the knowledge/power dimension in relation to childhood sexual abuse and its influence in shaping the history of our knowledge of child sexual abuse. In 1984 Jeffrey Masson published the first edition of a book which discussed the fact that, during his early career, Sigmund Freud had theorised on the effects of child sexual abuse and discussed the significance and lasting psychological effects of such abuse:

...on the one hand the adult who cannot escape his share in the mutual dependence necessarily entailed by a sexual relationship, and who is at the same time armed with complete authority and the right to punish, and can exchange the one role for the other to the uninhibited satisfaction of his whims, and on the other hand the child, who in his helplessness is at the mercy of this arbitrary use of power...all these grotesque and yet tragic disparities distinctly mark the later development of the individual and of his neurosis, with countless permanent effects which deserve to be traced in the greatest detail.

(Masson, 1992, pp 5-6)

Masson asserts that Freud had challenged others in the field of psychology at that time when they suggested that victims of child abuse were ‘hysterically lying’ and he suggested that such experiences were reluctantly recalled and done so only with genuine emotions such as shame’ (Masson, 1992, pp91, 103). Albeit in a more detailed and modern format these lasting psychological effects have now been established by the research in the field and are discussed in more detail below (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Freeman and Morris, 2001; O’Leary et al, 2010).

Freud’s work at that time in relation to childhood sexual abuse was also significant in that he spoke about a majority of such abuse occurring within the context of the family and that girls were more likely to be the victims of such abuse (Azzopardi, Alaggia and Fallon, 2017). Olafson et al and Masson highlight that ‘...no one had systematically described its pervasive psychological effect, which Freud listed in 1896 as hysteria, obsessions, possibly chronic paranoia, and other “functional psychoses” (Freud, 1989, pp 109-110; Masson, 1992 pp 5-6 cited in Olafson et al, 1993, p 10). These are elements which are known to us today and have been established by contemporary research, also discussed further in the following literature review,

Chapter Three (McGee, et al, 2002 and 2005; Douglas and Finkelhor, 2005) but which have vanished and re-emerged at different points through time.

Despite these discoveries Freud retracted these assumptions and theories about child sexual abuse due to outrage and lack of acceptance by Victorian society. In line with the development of psychoanalysis he thereby banished experiences of child sexual abuse to the realm of fantasy and desire (Azzopardi et al, 2017). The espousing of this latter theory by Freud had the effect of placing a question mark over the effects and very existence of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse within the dominant discourse. ‘Most reports of sexual abuse were, therefore, reframed as being motivated by children’s wishful fantasies for sexual attention’ (Azzopardi et al, 2017, p2). An effect which has echoed through the subsequent decades causing problematic situations for those affected by abuse in relation to belief, trust, shame and guilt and issues for society and researchers in relation to prevalence, nature and very existence of child sexual abuse (Rush, 1996). Freud writing almost thirty years on from his initial theory stated: “I believed these stories, and consequently supposed that I had discovered the roots of the subsequent neurosis in these experiences of sexual seduction in childhood... if the reader feels inclined to shake his head at my credulity, I cannot altogether blame him” (Olafson et al, 1993, p11).

The power of the dominant discourse within society to shape beliefs and knowledge surrounding a given matter is further highlighted by Masson and later Olafson when they present the fact that not only did Sigmund Freud reject and deny his original hypothesis in relation to child sexual abuse but that he actively sought to discredit those who attempted to bring the theory to light in the years that followed. This literature would seem to highlight an important distinction between existence of child sexual abuse and awareness of it. ‘It has been argued that the emergent social and medical sciences, as they won their monopoly of the competence to define categories such as class, race, gender, and normal sexuality, unwittingly incorporated self-serving prejudices into their explanatory models and convinced themselves and the public that these were

objective scientific findings' (Olafson et al, 1993, p13). Olafson et al drawing on the work of Masson and highlighting the power of dominant discourses suggests that 'among those discredited by this expanding professionalism were the late Victorian churchmen, feminists, and sex reformers who had criticised male sexual behavior and exposed the extent of child sexual abuse' (Olafson et al, 1993, p13). What follows is another example and examination, by French philosopher, historian and political activist Michel Foucault, of how knowledge is constructed and the impact that such knowledge may have on society and individuals.

Foucault discussed sexuality in terms of something that has been repressed and disciplined through various methods and mechanisms it is important to note that this research is using his writings to discuss child sexual abuse, awareness of same, and discourses that have developed surrounding this and specifically surrounding disclosure. The author delineates from Foucault's writings regarding the sexuality of children. In the main, Foucault's writing on this topic speaks of the design of children's schools and development of catholic education to segregate, deter and punish what might be viewed as natural sexual behaviour as a result of child development. However, it must also be noted that Foucault presents the story of 'Jouy', a farm-hand who has sex with a young girl (1976, p31-32), as part of an argument in critique of the legal and authoritarian discourses arising around what he calls 'this everyday occurrence in the life of a village sexuality' (p31). While Foucault is careful to never discuss the age of the child and throughout his writing on the subject always discusses sex as something wilful, there is a danger that his writing could be perceived as endorsing sex with a child as an appropriate form of sexuality. Bell notes that 'applying Foucauldian theory to the analysis of child abuse has both limitations and strengths, but in moving past its limitations, we may reach a clearer understanding of how power/knowledge contributes to the construction of individual beliefs surrounding child maltreatment and abusers' (2011, p101). Other authors have engaged with this debate by going so far as to challenge the so-called 'harm discourse' that has arisen regarding child sexual

abuse and have questioned current notions of childhood and the inevitability of intermediate or long-term harm of sexual abuse in childhood (Smith and Woodiwiss, 2016; Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman, 1998).

Michel Foucault's work on the History of Sexuality spans three volumes. The first of these volumes, which is the most pertinent for this study, is entitled 'The Will to Knowledge' and is an examination of the history of society's interaction with, understanding of and discourses surrounding sex. As discussed previously in this chapter, Taboo surrounding sex and sexuality was prevalent and compounded with respect to the issue of child sexual abuse. Foucault explains the development of this taboo as an 'injunction to silence and describes it in the sense of hear no evil, speak no evil see no evil; '...an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see and nothing to know' (Foucault, 1976, p4).

Foucault's writings on the Confessional present a clear example of how such societal taboos or discourses have been developed over time. The mechanism of the confessional can readily be contrasted and compared with the modern-day concept of disclosure and Foucault's detailed historical scholarship on the subject lends a valuable optic through which to examine the issue of contemporary disclosure.

Foucault describes the confessional, (parentheses added to highlight similarity to research topic) as not just an act, mechanism or place but as a process, 'a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject [the adult] is also the subject of the statement [the disclosure]; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner [social worker/policy(virtual)] who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires [by law/policy] the confession, prescribes [risk assesses] and appreciates it [level of priority], and intervenes in order to judge [credibility], punish [impeding], forgive, console [therapy], and reconcile [outcome]; a ritual in which truth is corroborated by the obstacles and

resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated [stigma, shame, taboo]; and finally, ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it [response to disclosure, re-traumatisation]' (Foucault, 1976, p62). Foucault's description of the confessional further echoes modern day disclosure to social work services. He describes the relationship of power that is present; 'the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained) [the adult], but in the one who listens [social worker/agency] and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know' (Foucault, 1976, p62).

Considering the above discussion of the emergence and regression of awareness of child sexual abuse Lalor (1998), citing studies dating from the 15th century to the 1800's and onwards, suggests that 'there is nothing to indicate that child sexual abuse is a novel phenomenon of the late 20th century' (1998, p3) and in his study, he notes references made to child sexual abuse by St. Columbanus in the 6th Century and further references in the early Irish Brehon Laws (Lalor, 1998). The Penitentials which originated in Ireland around the time of St. Columbanus listed many behaviours and acts which attracted a penance for the offender. Of these proscribed acts sexual misuse of children featured with both the offender and in some instances the child receiving a penance (Lalor, 2001); again, highlighting an early awareness of the issue.

Lalor in his text, *The End of Innocence*, brings us closer to a more contemporary context when he writes about child sexual abuse in Ireland in the 20th Century. Again, highlighting a distinction between existence and awareness of child sexual abuse, Lalor reasonably maintains that the fact that the 1908 Punishment of Incest Act criminalised incest suggests that 'it existed extensively enough as a phenomenon to warrant legislative action' (Lalor, 2001, p6). However, despite its proven existence and a legislative awareness 'the concept of sexual abuse of children did not exist within the public domain

in any meaningful sense...consequently, society was neither sensitised to its existence nor educated as to insidiousness' (Lalor, 2001, p6).

The prolific academic writer in the area of child sexual abuse, David Finkelhor, notes, in an article concerning the epidemiology of child sexual abuse, that up 'until the late 1970's in North America, [child sexual abuse] was thought to be minor because so few cases were reported' and he went to warn that '...lack of professional attention and small numbers of official reports are not necessarily indicators of low underlying prevalence' (1994, p409). Within this article he compares various international studies looking at rates of child sexual abuse; amongst them is a study conducted by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties in 1987. Finkelhor, going some way towards explaining the lack of public awareness of child sexual abuse, as highlighted by Lalor, notes that low rates of child sexual abuse and thereby low awareness of the issue in some countries 'may be due to social environments where candid disclosures of sexual behaviour are still very problematic' (1994, p411). Ferguson (1997), specifically referencing Ireland, reinforces this element when he suggests that in a traditional order characterised by cultural denial, patriarchal social relations and repression, sexual abuse was not classified and worked with in practice' (Ferguson, 1997, p31). Lalor also adds that 'restrictions upon the collection of data on child abuse in an anthropological context might be an unwillingness by researchers themselves to insult their hosts by asking potentially offensive questions' (1998, p13).

In an Irish context, the public awareness was awoken or, as we can see now, re-awoken to the impact and prevalence of child sexual abuse following the Father Brendan Smyth Affair (Moore, 1995 cited in Lalor, 1998; see also O'Sullivan, 2002) and the Ferns Report of the same year (The Ferns Report, 2005). O'Sullivan (2002) spoke about the 'extensive publicity and apparent dramatic increase in incidents of child sexual abuse' (2002, p176). As discussed above, in the literature concerning the emergence/regression debate, Olafson et al refer to this 're-awakening' stating that 'in the last century and a half, public and

professional awareness of sexual abuse has emerged and been suppressed repeatedly' (1993, p7). We can therefore see how current issues surrounding belief, trust and the very existence of child sexual abuse are historically mediated and while the existence of child sexual abuse is not in question in modern times its emergence and regression has had long lasting effects on the environment, social and individual context in which it occurs.

### Adult Disclosures of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Social Work Policy and Practice

To more fully understand adults' experiences of engaging with social work services it is important to examine the policy and practice which informs this interaction. The significance of this interaction from a policy point of view is that the adult, being such, is now outside the remit of the child protection services and therefore has no recourse within those services. In an initial study, which informs this current research, Mooney (2014) showed that adults may feel that the information they provide to a social worker may help a child who is currently at risk or indeed prevent a child or children from potentially being at risk at first instance (See also Department of Health and Children, 1999, Section 4.6.1). As mentioned previously, the concept of retrospective disclosures of abuse first appears in Irish child protection policy in 1999 with the publication of Children First (Department of Health and Children, 1999). Children First was launched by the then Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children, Frank Fahy TD operating under the Department of Health and Children. Section 4.6 of Children First 1999 states the following by way of explaining retrospective disclosures of abuse and, significantly, their importance within a child protection context;

In recent years, there have been increasing numbers of disclosures by adults of abuse which took place during their childhood. These

revelations often come to light in the context of the adults attending counselling.

(Department of Health and Children, 1999, p39)

A retrospective disclosure, for the purposes of this thesis, is defined as an incident whereby an adult discloses that they have experienced sexual abuse during their childhood. The point at which that disclosure takes place, for the purposes of this study, is to a child protection social work service in the Republic of Ireland. There is a dearth of research examining retrospective reporting and related practice and policy from a child protection perspective. However, there are many Irish policy documents which do refer to the retrospective reports of childhood abuse and describe what the previous and current approaches are and how Tusla social workers (formerly HSE and Health Board Social Workers) should deal with such information.

At Section 4 (Department of Health and Children, 1999, pp37-40), the 1999 guidelines state that in the event of a retrospective disclosure being made ‘it is essential that consideration is given to the current risk to any child who may be in contact with the alleged abuser’ and that if any such risk should exist the professional who receives the referral ‘should report the allegation to the Health Board without delay’ (Department of Health and Children, 1999, p40). In Children First 2011 the section dealing with retrospective disclosures of abuse (Section 3.6) is lifted almost word-for-word from the 1999 document except for one glaring distinction. At the end of the Section 4 of the 1999 document which deals with retrospective disclosures the following statement was included:

Investigation of disclosures by adult victims of past abuse frequently uncovers current incidences of abuse and is therefore an effective means of stopping the cycle of abuse.

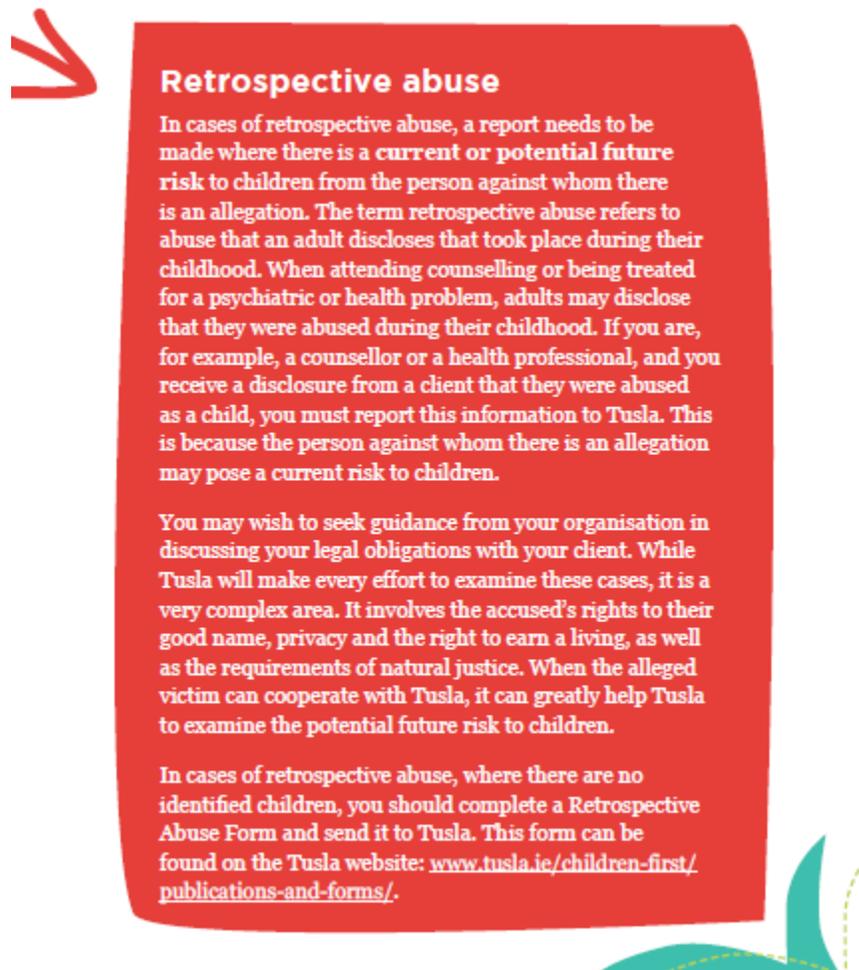
(Department of Health and Children, 1999, p 40)

While not offering anything by way of extra guidance, this critical section which highlights the relevance and importance of adult disclosures in the context of current and future child protection is omitted from the 2011 version of the guidelines. Given what has been presented earlier in the chapter regarding the social construction of knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse and the impact such messages can have, this appears to be a major step backwards in the support of adults wishing to come forward to make retrospective disclosures and could be argued that it sets a tone or direction of discourse away from the value of the disclosure towards a purely assessment driven, child protective role.

A Child Protection and Welfare Handbook (Health Service Executive, 2011) published alongside Children First 2011 also mentions retrospective disclosures. Section 3.1.16 of this handbook details the procedures to be followed in relation to retrospective disclosures. However, the section only goes so far as to re-state the guidelines as per Children First 2011 and does not add anything by way of extra guidance or direction. It does however, add an appendix which details some of the case law dealing with the assessment of retrospective disclosures, which will be discussed in the next section.

The section regarding retrospective disclosures in the most recent version of Children First (2017), in line with recently commenced mandatory reporting legislation in Ireland, is written very much in the context of professionals being required to report such disclosures to child protection services. The section speaks about disclosures coming to light in counselling sessions or during treatment for psychiatric or health problems (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017, p23) and, in the author's opinion, misses an opportunity to acknowledge and encourage disclosures of abuse from any sector at any given time. This must be contrasted with the previous iteration of Children First in 2011 which states at section 4.4 (i) and (ii) that 'the HSE must be open to receiving information from any source about a child who may not be receiving adequate care and protection' and 'having received such information, the HSE

must seek to establish whether the child in question is receiving adequate care and protection. To this end, it must coordinate information from all relevant sources and assess the situation' (2011, p19). While the 2011 guidelines refer to 'a child', the 2017 guidelines could have been viewed as an opportunity to cement social work's duty towards adults who come forward to disclose and thereby create an open and encouraging environment seeking disclosures from all sources. The 2017 guidelines are supported by a suite of associated documents one of which also refers to adult disclosures of abuse and goes slightly further than the main guidance to highlight the legal context of such disclosures:



**Retrospective abuse**

In cases of retrospective abuse, a report needs to be made where there is a **current or potential future risk** to children from the person against whom there is an allegation. The term retrospective abuse refers to abuse that an adult discloses that took place during their childhood. When attending counselling or being treated for a psychiatric or health problem, adults may disclose that they were abused during their childhood. If you are, for example, a counsellor or a health professional, and you receive a disclosure from a client that they were abused as a child, you must report this information to Tusla. This is because the person against whom there is an allegation may pose a current risk to children.

You may wish to seek guidance from your organisation in discussing your legal obligations with your client. While Tusla will make every effort to examine these cases, it is a very complex area. It involves the accused's rights to their good name, privacy and the right to earn a living, as well as the requirements of natural justice. When the alleged victim can cooperate with Tusla, it can greatly help Tusla to examine the potential future risk to children.

In cases of retrospective abuse, where there are no identified children, you should complete a Retrospective Abuse Form and send it to Tusla. This form can be found on the Tusla website: [www.tusla.ie/children-first/publications-and-forms/](http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/publications-and-forms/).

Figure 1: A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns, (Tusla-Child and Family Agency, 2017, p9)

While a welcome improvement from the lack of recognition of this area in the past, this policy revision did not offer any further guidance to practitioners.

### The Legal Landscape in relation to Retrospective Disclosures of Abuse

One of the distinctive features of a retrospective disclosure is the passage of time between abuse and referral; sometimes a great deal of time. As noted in the Children First guidelines, such referrals often come to light as a result of the adult seeking counselling or therapy, which in turn triggers a professional obligation upon the therapist or counsellor to mandatorily report any available information to the child protection services. It is a common feature of such referrals that a specific child at risk may not be identified. The alleged perpetrator may also be deceased or unidentified in the information provided. As with all referrals of abuse, the social worker is tasked with assessing risk, this may be risk that is current or may not manifest until some point in the future. While it must be noted that Children First 2011 is now superseded by its 2017 successor, Hamilton (2011) specifically referencing the 2011 guidelines suggests that ‘the HSE is required to be proactive in its approach to child protection and to take steps to mitigate against future risks’ (2011, p100).

This pro-active duty of social workers with respect to both current and retrospective referrals, was laid down in the judgement of Barr J. in the case of *MQ v. Glesson* [1998] 4IR 85. This case dealt with an individual who was training to be a social care worker and was due to commence a work placement working with children. The local social work office contacted the course providers and shared information in respect of previous allegations of physical and sexual abuse made against the individual. The individual’s progress was halted, and he took a legal action against the course provider and the social work department for sharing the information. Barr J. stated that ‘...once a situation comes to the knowledge of a health board relating to children being put at risk, there is no real distinction between present and future risk’. This

would appear to set legal precedent for the fact that retrospective referrals should not be dealt with any differently than ‘standard’ referrals to child protection services which may be more likely to identify current risks (See also Mooney, 2017). This precedent was supported by Justice Hedigan in *MI v. Health Service Executive* [2010] IEHC 159 who, referring to what are now known as ‘the Barr Principles’ stated that:

The [child protection services] ought to be able to conduct these vital investigations without having to constantly look over their shoulder for possible intervention by the courts. The principles referred to as the “Barr principles” are well established and, based upon them, it is, in my view, perfectly feasible for the [child protection services] to carry out an investigation of this kind with full regard to the applicant’s right to fair procedures and to a fair trial.

(*MI v. Health Service Executive* [2010] IEHC 159)

Justice Hedigan went on to emphasise the pro-active, abuse-preventing, role of child protection services and stated that “such an investigation should always occur at the earliest possible time after the risk to a vulnerable child is apprehended and before the risk crystallises into actual harm” (*MI v. Health Service Executive* [2010] IEHC 159). Subsequent judgements of Justice O’Neill in the case of *P.D.P v. Board of Management of a Secondary School and Ors.* [2010] IEHC 189 and Justice Keane in the case of *N.L v. HSE* [2014] IEHC 151, while supporting Barr, lay down precedents in respect of the need to afford an alleged abuser rights in respect of natural justice, good name and fair procedure and the need to balance these with the duty to investigate (See also Mooney, 2017; Nestor, 2016; Hamilton, 2011).

As with all legal scholarship it is prudent to examine the law in other jurisdictions that, while not binding, may provide persuasive authority. In the cases of *Phelps v Hillingdon* [2001] 2 AC 619, *S v. Gloucestershire County*

Council [2001] 2 WLR 909 and *L v Tower Hamlets London Borough Council and Another* [2001] Fam. 313 local authority's statutory duty to protect and promote the welfare of children was discussed. The respective Authorities claimed that a blanket-immunity to suit existed in terms of their duties; however, these claims were rejected. On a European level in the cases of *Z and Ors v. UK* (2001) and *TP and KM v. UK* (2001) the 'European Court held that no such immunity existed and that public authorities may be liable in negligence in respect of their childcare and child protection functions' (Arthur, 2002, ILT). Given the lack of policy surrounding the management and assessment of retrospective disclosures of abuse and the duty placed on social workers to be proactive in establishing any current risk to any child, the above cases begin to highlight the potential minefield ahead for social work in Ireland (Office of the Ombudsman, 2017; Mooney, 2014, 2017).

The other, equally problematic, side of this coin is presented in O'Neill J's judgment in the case of *PDP v. HSE* [2012] IEHC 591 where the HSE was found to be liable to the applicant for damages arising out of the investigation of an allegation of child sexual abuse. The applicant was forced to cease his employment at a local school and the investigation was subsequently closed. O'Neill J. stated as follows in awarding €736,984 in damages to the applicant:

I am satisfied that the malfeasance in public office of the HSE had the consequence of destroying, irreparably, the life which the applicant enjoyed in all its aspects, professional, social and domestic. Whilst the judgments of this court must go some considerable distance in redressing the wrong done to the applicant, the life that he has lost to date cannot be restored and in the future, will not be adequately repaired

(*ibid.*).

Hamilton (2011) highlights that 'Service users unhappy with a course of action taken by a social care professional may seek to bring a civil action relying on tort law' (2011, p51). McMahon and Binchy, in their seminal text concerning

the law of tort, clarify this aspect of the law by stating that ‘there are certain statutory functions...which appear so essential in maintaining the social scaffolding that it is reasonable for society, through the courts, to insist that they be discharged properly, under sanction of a damages award’ (2000, p534). It is proffered that the protection and welfare of current and future children forms an essential component of this social scaffolding.

While there is no specific offence of Child Sexual Abuse under Irish law there is a comprehensive legal definition included in Part 5 of the Children First Act 2015 which encompasses all previous legislative definitions of sexual crimes against children. The Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act which came into being in 1998 and was enacted with the aim of providing protection, from civil liability, to persons who report incidents of child abuse. This would appear, from the outset, to be a valuable addition in relation to policy surrounding retrospective disclosures of abuse and the protection of children from alleged abusers. However, the Act is limited in that it does not include referrals which relate to a risk of sexual abuse.

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act, 2012 goes further by way of adding to policy in the area of retrospective reporting of abuse in that it makes it a criminal offence for an individual to withhold knowledge of a scheduled offence against a child or vulnerable person. It also goes further than the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 in that it refers to a belief that such an offence has been committed and refers to the possession of information that may be of material relevance in such situations. The Act places a legal obligation upon individuals to report any knowledge or belief of such abuses and goes further to specifically excuse survivors of abuse from this obligation. Section 2 of the Act exempts those who have experienced abuse from having to report it or those who have been requested by such a person not to report.

Section 176 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 lays down the offence of Reckless Endangerment of Children which proscribes situations whereby children are left in situations that create a substantial risk of abuse or failure to take reasonable steps to protect such children knowing that a child is in such a situation. The Criminal Law (Incest Proceedings) Act 1995 criminalises the act of sexual intercourse between close relations such as a child, parent or sibling.

While discussed previously, the Child Care Act, 1991 is important to mention again here as it states the statutory obligation placed upon the Health Boards, now Tusla and in turn their employees, Social Workers, to carry out the function of child protection. Following the enactment of the Child Care Act 1991, it subsequently becoming legally effective in the mid-nineties, the primary duty to act to protect children at risk fell to the Health Service Executive and this responsibility became enshrined within Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991 (Hamilton, 2011, p99). Finally, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, which legally transferred the role and responsibilities of the Health Service Executive, in respect of child welfare and protection to Tusla, also highlights Tusla's role to support and promote the protection of children. (For more on Child Care Law in Ireland see also Nestor, 2016; Shannon, 2005, 2011; Hamilton, 2011).

### Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect (2014)

A Tusla (2014) policy document entitled "Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect" has attempted to bring some clarity to this area for social work practitioners. The policy has not yet been published but is being used by social workers in practice and the draft version, has been publicly criticised due to what social workers have termed

“an absence of the victim” within the policy and it being balanced too heavily in favour of the alleged abuser’s rights (Shanahan, June 8th, 2015).

The policy details how social work services should respond to allegations of abuse concerning either children or adults, whether current or historic. Any developments in this area of policy and practice are welcome however a number of challenging issues are posed by this draft policy in terms of the dynamics of sexual abuse and violence. For example, section 14 of the policy potentially serves to create a risk of re-traumatisation. The section seeks to penalise complainants (i.e. adults or children) who do not wish to engage further, or cease their engagement, with social work services regarding their disclosure. Social workers are directed by the policy to advise such complainants that:

...if he or she refuses to provide details of abuse that may be viewed as impeding a criminal investigation into suspected criminal violence being perpetrated against a child, he or she may be liable to prosecution under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of information on offences against children and vulnerable persons) Act 2012

(Child and Family Agency, 2014, p. 17)

Aside from the potential psychological trauma that the above provision could cause by informing a adult who is disclosing childhood sexual abuse that they may be prosecuted for not fully complying with a social work investigation, it is important to note that such an adult will be referring their own experience of abuse, potentially highlighting the presence of an alleged abuser and drawing social work’s attention to other potential victims and survivors. The policy also misinterprets the relevant legislation in that under Section 2(3) of the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 such an adult is removed from liability for withholding such information. ‘The rationale being that to force an adult or

child survivor of abuse to disclose and report their abusive experience could have serious personal consequences for that individual' (Mooney, 2017, p9). Further to this, at Section 24.1(b) the policy outlines a process whereby an alleged abuser may seek an opportunity to directly question the complainant (Child and Family Agency, 2014, p. 27).

Despite new policy, recent Health Information and Quality Authority reports (2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017) show that some social work services are still not assessing adult disclosures of abuse. The Health Information and Quality Authority of Ireland (HIQA) has an independent role in auditing health and social care providers and services, including child protection services, within the Republic of Ireland. In respect of various national child protection offices they have reported that; "...a large number of retrospective abuse referrals had not yet been assessed which meant that the potential risk to children was not fully known" (HIQA, August 2015, p. 8); "inspectors found there were significant delays in the service assessing risks in relation to retrospective abuse and there were immediate and high risks that were not dealt with in a timely manner" (HIQA, March 2016a, p. 28); and again highlighting the importance of these types of referrals in a child protection context; "children identified as a result of retrospective disclosures were risk assessed and actions were taken to keep them safe" (HIQA, March 2016b, p. 18). HIQA's recent overview of their investigations in 2016 notes "Examples of Poor Practice" in respect of adult disclosures of childhood abuse:

Inspectors identified poor management and oversight of retrospective allegations of abuse against adults. This included delays in the service area assessing the risks and, when assessed, delays in dealing with immediate and high-risk cases.

(HIQA, 2017, p. 52)

Due to the lack of policy and public awareness child protection services in Ireland have not recorded figures in respect of retrospective disclosures.

Therefore it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the issue regarding how these referrals are handled. This is however changing and in July 2016 the Minister for Children advised that:

In 2015, Tusla conducted a National Review of Cases Awaiting Allocation which included information on the number of retrospective cases. The review showed, at February 2015, that of the 8,865 cases awaiting allocation nationally there were 1,204 cases of retrospective abuse disclosures. The review did not look at the average waiting times for retrospective cases awaiting allocation of a social worker.

(Zappone, 2016)

The Office of the Ombudsman, which is a distinct and separate independent public body from the Ombudsman for Children, charged with investigating complaints from the public against public bodies, has also published a report which specifically highlights issues regarding the assessment and management of retrospective disclosures and echoes the findings of the various HIQA investigations discussed above (Office of the Ombudsman, 2017). Some of the key findings from this report included delays in assessing adult disclosures ranging between 15 months and 5 years; adult disclosures remaining unallocated to a social worker for a period of six months; allegations misfiled and failure to record notes (Office of the Ombudsman, 2017). The Ombudsman also highlighted undue delay in assessing adult disclosures; the need for upholding of rights to fair procedures; a need for improved communication and support and training for social work staff, citing problematic issues regarding social workers' adherence to Tusla's 2014 policy, as discussed above.

Retrospective disclosures have also been the focus of a recent tribunal of inquiry (on-going at time of submission, June 2018) involving an alleged false allegation of sexual abuse against a member of An Garda Síochána, Sergeant Maurice McCabe. While it is not feasible nor necessary to recount the details of this matter within this research it is important to note the similar issues

regarding management, assessment, delay, training and awareness have been levelled against the child protection services regarding their handling of retrospective disclosures of childhood abuse (See Clifford, 2017; thejournal.ie). On July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the CEO of Tusla, Fred McBride, acknowledged that retrospective disclosures have been “one of the major challenges facing us since we were set up as an agency” (RTE’s This Week, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2017).

## Summary

This chapter has provided a historical, political and cultural context regarding adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse ranging from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century up to time of writing. It has explained how our perceptions of abuse and neglect have been socially constructed and mediated and how issues regarding taboo and morality have played a significant role in how society interacts with those affected by abuse. This chapter also highlights the reactionary nature of the development of the Irish child protection system and social work practice in this area and how such developments have frequently followed significant findings of abuse and neglect within our communities, families and institutions. The chapter has progressed this issue to show how such developments, while reactionary, have also been misapplied or not adhered to by our child protection services. Key reports of the Ombudsman for Children and the State itself in 2010 and 2008 respectively have been discussed. The current changing policy and legal landscape in Ireland creates opportunities for change; further emphasising the timeliness and necessity of this research.

Having established the context within which adults disclose, the following chapter details the literature relating to the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse, the dynamics of disclosure, the effects and impacts of abuse, how these affect an adult’s interaction with services and finally.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### Introduction

Adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse are key to combatting current abuse. They have been identified in Irish national child protection policy as an ‘effective means of breaking the cycle of abuse’ (Department of Health and Children, 1999) as well as being a critical point in the lives of those adults who come forward to disclose. We can see from the previous chapter that Irish policy continues to be slow to recognise and develop effective responses to sexual abuse in childhood and has relatively recently recognised the issue of adult disclosures of such abuse. This chapter focuses on the main literature in the field of child sexual abuse and examines the specific areas of Prevalence, Disclosure, Effects of Abuse, Interaction with Services and a current gap in social work knowledge. The purpose of this review is to move us towards addressing the central question of what it is like for adults to disclose experiences of abuse to child protection social workers.

There is a vast literature regarding childhood sexual abuse with ‘more than 20,000 research papers on CSA listed under the most renowned research databases’ (Collin-Vézina et al, 2013, p1). The following literature review is compiled using a snowballing technique; ‘when applying a snowballing approach, the first challenge is to identify a start set of papers to use for the snowballing procedure’ (Wohlin, 2014, p2). Key authors and seminal papers in the field of adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse were identified and subsequent papers were identified by association and connection with the research topic. What follows therefore is an exploration of the key literature in the areas of child sexual abuse prevalence, disclosure, effects and impacts and effects upon engagement with professionals and official services. Authors in this field utilise different terms to identify adults who have experienced abuse, namely ‘survivor’ or ‘victim’ (Hunter, 2010), and direct quotations from such

authors will retain these references within this chapter. The author of this thesis has chosen to use the phrase ‘adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood’ to identify such adults.

Following from the Context chapter which has built a picture of societal attitudes to child sexual abuse being historically and politically mediated, with specific attention paid to Ireland, this literature review begins by attempting to chart the phenomenon of child sexual abuse. The chapter begins with an examination of the key literature relating to prevalence of child sexual abuse internationally and nationally, some literature relating to a possible decline in prevalence and issues regarding our reliance on such data being based upon disclosure. Given the depth and breadth of research in this field, this section seeks to signpost the reader to the more extensive field. This leads to a thorough examination of the current state of disclosure scholarship. This section draws upon the key international authors in this field such as Alaggia, Collin-Vézina, McElvaney and Hunter, amongst others. This section will define disclosure, discuss issues regarding disclosure of childhood abuse, examine the impacts of ‘telling’ and use existing research to chart the established facilitators and barriers to disclosing an experience of child sexual abuse. Against this backdrop, the chapter then turns its attention to the effects of an experience of childhood sexual abuse and discusses these in terms of the life-course and impacts in to adulthood. This culminates in a discussion of the literature relating to adults’ experiences of interacting with professionals or official services. This section examines key literature in respect of professions other than social work and identifies a gap in social work knowledge in respect of how adults interact with social work services to disclose abuse. The chapter concludes with a brief overview and strengthening of the rationale for this research.

## Prevalence

Child sexual abuse affects all facets of our society (Reitsema and Grietens, 2016) and is increasingly being viewed as a public health issue (Finkelhor, 1994; Mian and Collin-Vézina, 2017). It is therefore critical to ascertain the prevalence of child sexual abuse to combat this issue, direct resources and better equip our services to facilitate and respond to disclosure. According to Stoltenborgh et al's review of the literature in 2011 'prevalence refers to the number of individuals having experienced sexual abuse during childhood (Fallon et al., 2010; Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor, 1986)' (2011, p80).

To chart the prevalence of child sexual abuse it is important to define what is being examined. One of the limiting factors of prevalence statistics is how those collecting the statistics define child sexual abuse. Collin-Vézina et al tell us that 'nowadays, the field is evolving towards a more inclusive understanding of CSA that is broadly defined as any sexual activity perpetrated against a minor by threat, force, intimidation, or manipulation' (2013, p1) and that this is in keeping with the World Health Organisation's definition which defines child sexual abuse as 'between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person' (WHO, 2003). In an Irish context, the Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children defines sexual abuse for all professionals and members of community and voluntary groups who have contact with children. The Guidelines state that 'sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography' (DCYA, 2017, p10).

As stated in the context chapter, David Finkelhor states that up 'until the late 1970's in North America, [child sexual abuse] was thought to be minor because

so few cases were reported' and that '...lack of professional attention and small numbers of official reports are not necessarily indicators of low underlying prevalence' (1994, p409). Finkelhor et al (2014) provides a comprehensive overview of prevalence statistics in the US and internationally. They stated that the research that provides the best estimates in relation to prevalence 'tend to have used meta-analyses such as those by Bolen and Scannapieco (1999) (20% for girls and 7% for boys) or Gorey and Leslie (1997) (12%-17% for girls and 5%-8% for boys) for the United States and for the international scene by Stoltenborgh et al. (2011) (18.0% for girls and 7.6% for boys) and Pereda et al. (2009) (19.7% for girls and 7.9% for boys)' (Finkelhor et al, 2014, p329). In 2009 Pereda, Guilera, Forns and Gómez-Benito presented a follow up study of Finkelhor's *International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse* (1994), with an aim of testing 'the hypothesis as stated by Finkelhor (1994), that child sexual abuse continues to be one of the most important public health problems in all societies' (Pereda et al, 2009, p332). The study included an analysis of 39 academic articles concerning the prevalence of child sexual abuse and reported on prevalence in 21 different countries. Their results showed that 'prevalence of child sexual abuse had remained fairly constant over the 12-year period examined' (2009, p337). Finkelhor goes on to clarify that most of these studies were based upon adult retrospective accounts of childhood abuse (Ibid, p329).

Stoltenborgh et al (2011), citing two other studies, note that 'although there seems to be some consensus on the global and persistent occurrence of CSA, controversy exists as to the overall prevalence of CSA with rates varying from 0.1% (Mackenzie, Blaney, Chivers, and Vincent, 1993) to 71.0% (Everill and Waller, 1995). Stoltenborgh et al. 'conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of 217 publications on CSA published from 1982 to 2008, including 331 independent samples with a total of 9,911,748 participants, aiming to reveal the extent of the problem' (2011, p79). Their results revealed that a 'combined prevalence for the total set of studies ( $k = \frac{1}{4} 331$ ,  $N = \frac{1}{4} 9,911,748$ ) was 11.8% (95% CI: 10.0–13.8%;  $p < .01$ ) (Ibid, p84). Much of the diversity in prevalence

statistics is related to various factors including selected methodology, definition of sexual abuse and sample characteristics (Pereda et al, 2009).

### *Limitations of Prevalence Statistics*

Pereda et al went on to discuss some issues that may arise in relation to gathering and interpreting prevalence data. They highlight some variance between international prevalence of child sexual abuse and state that ‘differences in research methodology (e.g., child abuse definitions, data gathering techniques, populations sampled, the use of broad or more behaviourally specific questions) are thought to account for most of the variance in prevalence rates between studies’ (2009, p332). They also highlight issues surrounding a lack of consensus on the definition of child sexual abuse across studies ‘in part because it is determined by cultural and community standards (Bradley and Lindsay, 1987)’ (2009, p337). This issue relating to accurate prevalence is also highlighted by Douglas and Finkelhor in a later study in 2005 where they suggest that some studies attempt to assess all forms of abuse while others focus on specific types of abuse (Douglas and Finkelhor, 2005).

The central cause of variation in the types of prevalence data produced is thought to be the research methodology used to gather such data (Finkelhor, 1994). Pereda et al (2009) support this assertion stating that ‘differences in research methodology (e.g., child abuse definitions, data gathering techniques, populations sampled, the use of broad or more behaviourally specific questions) are thought to account for most of the variance in prevalence rates between studies’ (2009, p332). The literature is also inconsistent in respect of the language used to elicit responses in the research interviews and survey questionnaires. Finkelhor et al (2014) in their analyses of three similarly designed surveys used the term ‘forced’ in their survey design; ‘At any time in your life, did a grown-up you know touch your private parts when they should

not have or make you touch their private parts? Or did a grown-up you know force you to have sex?’ (Finkelhor et al, 2014, p330). McGee et al (2002) in the SAVI report problematised such an approach stating that they chose not to ‘use the words “against your will” as most experts agree that the concept of “consent” does not apply in the context of childhood’ noting that due to age, maturity and position of authority some children may not view themselves as being coerced (2002, p62).

Many studies of child sexual abuse prevalence use different definitions of abuse and may incorporate wide or narrow interpretations of what constitutes sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1994). Stoltenborgh et al warn that ‘how CSA is defined and subsequently operationalized might have an impact on the reported prevalence’ (2011, p80). Collin-Vézina et al continue this warning in to the more recent literature in this area stating that ‘the exact extent of the problem of CSA is difficult to approximate given the lack of consensus on the definition used in research inquiries, as well as the differences in the data collection systems across areas’ (2013, p2). Finkelhor et al (2014) speak about the ‘terminological ambiguity’ that exists which they say has not been addressed in the literature (2014, p329); Finkelhor having previously called for a common definition to be used (1994, p34). Finkelhor et al (2014) discuss the use of the term ‘sexual abuse’ in a child protection context, which in the United States, primarily relates to abuse perpetrated by an older care-giver or adult. Highlighting the potential ambiguity in just one area of data collection they state that:

...it is not clear whether consumers of these statistics from population surveys are aware that they generally amalgamate what is thought of as sexual abuse in the narrow child protection sense with what might more typically be labelled sexual assault.

(2014, p330)

In a US context, Finkelhor (1994) is representative in this respect where he states that wide variations in rates have been found in studies within the U.S.,

and these have been explained by methodological factors, such as the survey methodology, the questions asked, and the definition of sexual abuse (1994, p411).

In addition to methodology, Stoltenborgh et al's global meta-analysis of prevalence studies established that 'sampling has been identified more than once as contributing to the diversity in CSA prevalence rates' (2011, p80). The sample used in this PhD research is predominantly male (4/1) and while it is discussed in detail in the following Methodology chapter it is prudent at this point to explore why gender is key to interrogating how we determine child sexual abuse prevalence. Much of the literature in respect of the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse uses samples of female populations. Stoltenborough et al offer many reasons for this phenomenon in the literature. They cite several studies which support the contention that 'gender differences for reported prevalence of CSA may be due to either higher occurrence of CSA among girls than among boys, or to boys' more reluctant attitude toward disclosing their CSA experiences' (2011, p89). Stoltenbourg et al proffer that this reluctance on the part of males may be due to 'society's traditional view of men as aggressors rather than as victims (ibid, p89). Compounding this issue is the phenomenon that the time between abusive experience and disclosure, or 'latency to disclosure' as Alaggia puts it (2010), tends to be longer for males than it is for females (O'Leary and Barber, 2008). O'Leary and Barber's study established that 17.2% of men in their study disclosed in less than 10 years compared to 25.4% of women. This issue becomes more apparent however in respect of those who did not disclose for more than 20 years with the percentages being 25.4% for women and 44.9% of men (O'Leary and Barber, 2008, p138). Drawing on Maikovich et al (2009) Collin Vézina et al (2013) note that 'the victim's gender, may also influence substantiation decisions' in that 'that workers were less likely to substantiate cases involving male victims' (2013, p3).

The above literature regarding the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse begins to hint at the inherent risks attached to reliance on prevalence statistics. Gorey and Leslie (1997) warn that ‘interpretation of the extant body of research on the prevalence of child abuse ought to be accompanied by extreme cognizance of study characteristics’ (1997, p395). Nationally and internationally the literature calls for further research in this area to accurately chart the extent of child sexual abuse in our societies and communities (Finkelhor and Jones, 2006; Collin-Vézina et al, 2013; McGee et al, 2002).

Collin-Vézina, Daigneault and Hébert (2013) emphasise these possible inherent risks when they discuss the problematic issues surrounding the establishment of accurate prevalence rates. They suggest that research findings ‘clearly demonstrate a major lack of congruence between the low number of official reports of [child sexual abuse] to authorities, and the high rates of [child sexual abuse] that youth and adults self-report retrospectively’ and that ‘many reports of child abuse are never passed on. In fact, the majority of studies highlight the fact that many victims continue to be unrecognised’ (2013, p2). They refer to this issue as the ‘tip of the iceberg’ suggesting that what is reported in prevalence studies and the actual incidence of child sexual abuse may be vastly different. They go on to highlight how the intricate, multi-faceted, nature of this area can play such an influence in what we know and what we don’t know about child sexual abuse, its prevalence, its influence and its potentially long-lasting effects. ‘Disclosure is a delicate and sensitive process that is influenced by several factors, including implicit or explicit pressure for secrecy, feelings of responsibility or blame, feelings of shame or embarrassment, or fear of negative consequences’ (2013, p2). Collin-Vézina et al., suggest that ‘relying on official reports to determine the magnitude of child sexual abuse is a method that carries a constant error of underestimation. In other words, children that are identified are only those that were able to disclose, were believed, reported to, and followed up by proper authorities, and those cases that presented enough

evidence to be substantiated as [child sexual abuse]' (2013, p3). They note that these 'layers of influence' have the effect of increasing the difference between the existence of child sexual abuse and our awareness of it.

These specific issues are highlighted in an Irish context by the landmark report commissioned by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre entitled Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (McGee, Garavan, de Barra, Byrne, and Conroy, 2002). In its opening paragraph the SAVI report states the following:

...there has been a rapidly developing awareness of the profound impact of sexual violence and its consequences, not only on individuals and their families but also on society as a whole. The seriousness of sexual violence is both a cause and a consequence of the particular secrecy with which it has typically been surrounded.

(McGee et al, 2002, p4)

The SAVI study conducted anonymous telephone interviews with a randomly selected portion of the general population of Ireland to assess the prevalence of sexual abuse. The total sample size was 3,118 participants and one of the most striking statistics produced by the report was that almost half (47%) of those who disclosed experiences of sexual violence during the research interview had never previously disclosed the abuse they suffered (McGee et al, 2002). This statistic is alarming in that it echoes the warning highlighted by Collin-Vézina relating to the existence of the 'constant error of underestimation' and the 'tip of the iceberg' quality of sexual abuse prevalence statistics (Collin-Vézina et al, 2013).

Being cautious to take note of the above-mentioned study-based subjectivity of child sexual abuse prevalence it was appropriate for the purposes of this research to use the SAVI report as a national example. The SAVI report established, in an Irish context at least, that 42 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men have experienced some form of sexual abuse during their lifetime. Data collected from over 3,000 participants of the study in respect of

prevalence of sexual abuse in childhood showed that one in five women and one in six men were affected (2002, p174). This presents the extent of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and poses the question of why individuals find it difficult or choose not to disclose. The SAVI study is now 16 years old and need to be revised and updated. (At time of writing, commitment to a re-run of the SAVI is being considered by the Irish Government)

### *Is Child Sexual Abuse Declining?*

In spite of the possible issues regarding collection of accurate prevalence data, over the past two decades debate has taken place within the literature regarding the possible decline in child sexual abuse (Jones, Finkelhor and Kopiec, 2001; Leventhal, 2001; Collin-Vézina, Hélie and Trocmé, 2010). The foundation research in this respect was conducted by Jones et al (2001) and, based on interviews with US State child protection service providers, noted that decline was occurring within the United States by approximately 39% between 1992 and 1999. While the research highlights a lack of a clear rationale, ‘State officials cited a diverse array of possible causes for the decline, including: (1) increased evidentiary requirements to substantiate cases, (2) increased caseworker caution due to new legal rights for caregivers, and (3) increasing limitations on the types of cases that agencies accept for investigation’ (Ibid, 2001, p1139).

Of note in Jones et al’s study was how changes in child protection policy may also have contributed to a perceived decline in child sexual abuse cases. ‘The most frequently cited change was increasing cautiousness by [child protection service] agencies about investigating and substantiating allegations of abuse’ with some of the participants of the study highlighting the level of evidence required to investigate or substantiate a claim of abuse being a possible cause of perceived decline (2001, p1150). They note that one participant stated that fear of suit is a genuine concern for child protection workers with the potential for

their credibility to be called into question; resulting in a reluctance to substantiate allegations (ibid). This is somewhat echoed in respect of the assessment of adult disclosures of abuse in Ireland as discussed in the previous chapter.

Jones et al's study found that reduced numbers of child protection staff meant that resources were scarcer when it came to assessing allegation of abuse and that this may have led to higher thresholds for initiating investigations in some States (2001, p1151). It is noteworthy that despite these changes in policy and practice being potentially attributed to a decline 'when asked their opinion about whether they thought that the decline in cases was caused by a decline in incidence, over half said "No"' (2001, p1153). In a revisit to the subject by Finkelhor and Jones in 2006 they concluded that 'after considerable efforts to study the CPS data in context, we have concluded that they probably reflect at least in part a real decline in sexual abuse' (2006, p688).

Collin-Vézina et al (2010) sought to examine this issue of decline in respect of Canada and found that, while much more research attention is required in this area, child sexual abuse was not declining and in some instances, was increasing. In a national context the SAVI report (2002) is Ireland's only study of sexual abuse prevalence within the national population. While Ireland's prevalence statistics compare internationally, this study is now 16 years old. With many developments and changes within our child protection and policing systems, and 16 years of increased societal awareness, more research is needed to assess whether child sexual abuse is increasing or decreasing in an Irish context. Leventhal (2001), in discussing Jones' 2001 study, highlights a problematic issue with the decline hypothesis:

it is important to remember that reports to child protective services of child sexual abuse represent only those children who have come to the attention of professionals in the community. Studies of adults who were sexually abused during childhood indicate that only a small percentage of the children—10% or less in studies from the United States (Timmick, 1985) and

Sweden (Edgardh and Ormstad, 2000)—reported the abuse to a professional, such as a teacher or police officer. Because reports to child protective services represent the tip of the iceberg, data about changes in the number of reports or in the number of substantiated cases should be interpreted cautiously when considering how such changes relate to changes in the true occurrence of sexual abuse

(p1137)

### *Reliance on Disclosure*

Prevalence statistics are generated based on studies which gather self-reported accounts and officially-reported statistics. ‘In other words, children that are identified are only those that were able to disclose, were believed, reported to, and followed up by proper authorities, and those cases that presented enough evidence to be substantiated as CSA. (Collin-Vézina et al. 2013, p3). Finkelhor (1994), conducting a review of studies, found that approximately half of victims of childhood sexual abuse disclosed their experiences. ‘This problem is often referred to as the phenomenon of the “tip of the iceberg”, where only a fraction of CSA situations are visible and a much higher proportion remain undetected’ (Collin-Vézina, 2013, p2). This is echoed in the Irish literature in that the SAVI report found that of those participants who had experience childhood sexual abuse almost half (47%) of them had never previously disclosed prior to the research interview (McGee et al, 2002). This rate of disclosure appears to drop further still when we examine disclosure to official recipients or State authorities (Alaggia, Collin-Vézina and Lateef, 2017). Again, citing the ‘Tip of the Iceberg’ analogy Leventhal discusses the following:

A striking finding from prevalence studies is the low rate of reporting of sexual abuse to an authority, such as police or protective services. In the Los Angeles Times national survey, only 3% of the incidents were reported to the police or other public agencies (Timnick, 1985). It is clear from such low reporting figures that children

reported to protective service agencies are just “the tip of the iceberg.”

(Leventhal, 1998, p482)

The reality therefore is that many victims travel through their life course unrecognised (Alaggia et al, 2017; Collin Vézina et al, 2013; Putnam, 2003). Finkelhor adds to this stating that ‘because so much sexual abuse remains undisclosed, many researchers have concluded that the best picture of the scope of the problem is obtained by asking adults about their childhood experiences’ (Finkelhor, 1994, p34). Finkelhor attaches a warning which encompasses the difficulties and barriers to disclosure when he states that ‘when interpreting prevalence findings, most researchers have warned that all percentages based on adult retrospective reports are probably underestimates’ (Ibid, p37).

### *Perpetrators*

Historically, society viewed child sexual abuse as a phenomenon of the lower classes (Olafson, 1998). Over time the media instilled a notion of ‘stranger danger’ (Powell and Scanlon, 2015) with a ‘misconception of sexual abusers as paedophiles, “guileful strangers” who prey on children in public places’ (Collin-Vézina et al, 2013, p5). It is now well established, and research demonstrates, ‘that the vast majority of perpetrators are known by the victims, but that a minority are actually family members’ (Leventhal, 1998, p482). Leventhal states that ‘26% of the perpetrators were less than 18 years of age’ (Leventhal, 1998, p482). This is a phenomenon now well established in the research (Finkelhor et al., 2013; Finkelhor, 2009; McGee et al, 2002). In an Irish context, the SAVI report identified that 25.8% of perpetrators identified by the participants were aged 17 or younger and that these offenders were more likely to engage in ‘contact abuse’ (56%) which the study defined as all sexual, non-penetrative, contact with 13% engaged in penetrative abuse (McGee et al.,

2002, p89-90). From an ‘Early intervention’ perspective with approximately a quarter of childhood sexual abuse being perpetrated by children themselves the argument for encouragement and facilitation of disclosure would seem to be critical in combating future abuse and the persistence of effects in to adulthood related to non-disclosure (McElvaney, 2015).

The Irish SAVI Report (McGee et al, 2002) also explores the aspect of ‘who perpetrates child sexual abuse’ and discusses the importance of prevalence studies to better inform interventions and programmes of awareness. SAVI separated perpetrator types in to five categories (family members, neighbours, authority figures, friends/acquaintances and strangers) (Ibid, p85). Each category accounted for approximately one fifth of the abusive experiences disclosed during the study. What is apparent from these data is that once the categories are grouped into perpetrators known to the child and the standalone category of ‘strangers’ we see that Leventhal’s (1998) conclusions stand up in an Irish context. A majority of those who experienced childhood sexual abuse knew their perpetrator but, of those known, only a minority were family members. Where perpetrators are known but outside of the family, Reitsema and Grietens (2016) note that ‘as the process of grooming develops, perpetrators are more likely to become more known to the victim prior to abuse’ (2016, p333). They also highlight that ‘the relationship between the child and the perpetrator is thus often a complex and emotionally meaningful one, which may greatly complicate the disclosure process for children’ (2016, p333). Figures 1 and 2 below, taken from the SAVI study (McGee et al, 2002), illustrate some of these features in an Irish context:

Relationship of Perpetrator to Abused Child	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Abuser known to the child – family members</b>		
Father	1.0 (3)	3.5 (15)
Brother	2.0 (6)	4.8 (21)
Uncle	4.0 (12)	7.6 (33)
Grandfather	0.0 (0)	2.3 (10)
Other male relative	0.7 (2)	0.7 (3)
Other female relative	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)
Stepfather	0.0 (0)	0.5 (2)
Mother	0.3 (1)	0.2 (1)
Cousin (male/female)	5.5 (17)	3.4 (15)
Brother-in-law	0.0 (0)	0.5 (2)
<b>Abuser known to the child – non-family members</b>		
Neighbour	18.9 (57)	21.5 (92)
Friend	17.3 (52)	4.9 (21)
Boyfriend	0.0 (0)	1.8 (8)
Authority figure <sup>a</sup>	22.1(66)	16.3 (71)
Acquaintance known > 24 hrs	7.4 (22)	6.1 (26)
<b>Abuser not known to the child</b>		
Acquaintance known < 24 hrs	1.7 (5)	0.9 (4)
Stranger	18.7 (56)	22.9 (98)

<sup>a</sup> Not otherwise listed

*Figure 2: Perpetrator Characteristics of Child Sexual Abuse for Men and Women Reporting Abuse (McGee et al, 2002, p86)*

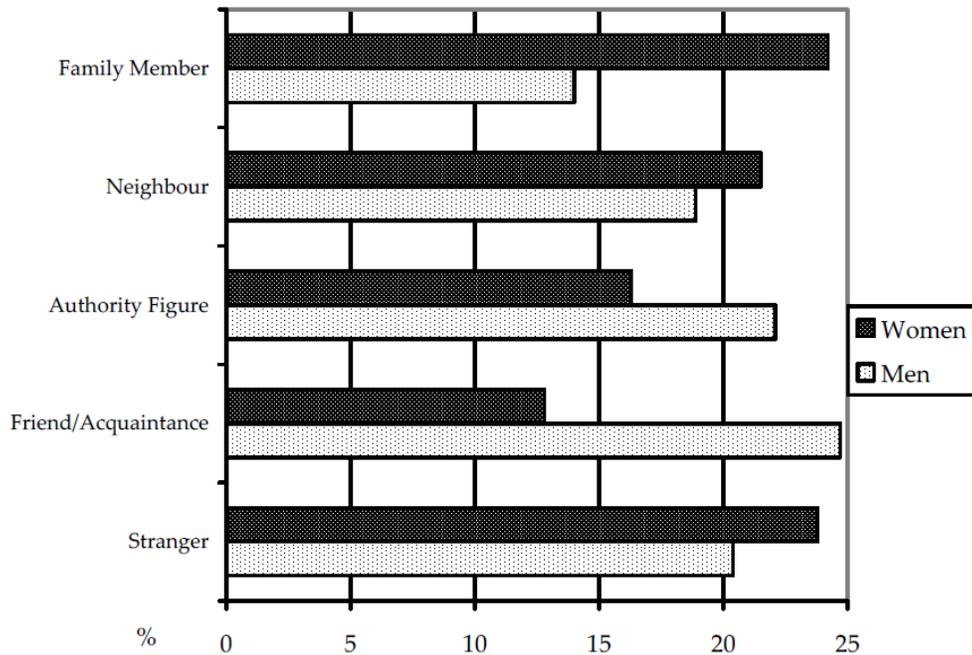


Figure 3: Comparisons of Categories of Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim (McGee et al, 2002, p87)

### *Risk Factors*

Irrespective of a historical lack of attention and issues regarding the diversity and inconsistency in prevalence findings, it is clear from the international literature that child sexual abuse is a global phenomenon affecting all strata of our societies. Finkelhor notes ‘that in every locale where it has been sought, researchers have demonstrated its existence at levels high enough to be detected through surveys of a few hundred adults in the general population’ (1994, p412). Due to the almost equal spread of perpetrators across the five categories noted in SAVI (McGee et al., 2002) and to the inter-weaving of power, authority, opportunity, and vulnerability it is not possible to state conclusively why children are sexually abused. It is possible that the dynamics and facets are as individual as those perpetrating and those being abused. However, the literature does offer some sense of what the risk factors are in respect of child sexual abuse.

Various studies have examined the potential risk factors relating to an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Girls are at higher risk of sexual abuse for a longer period of childhood than boys (Collin-Vézina et al, 2013; Finkelhor et al, 2014) and while ‘less information is available about the perpetrators of boys, studies indicate that familial abuse occurs much less frequently than in girls’ (Leventhal, 1998, p482). Family make-up and dynamics also impact upon risk with absence of one or both parents (Collin-Vézina et al 2013), parental adversity (Wolfe, 2009), extreme conflict in the home and having a ‘mother who is mentally ill’ (Flemming et al, 1997, p55-56) all increasing risk. Honer et al (2006) also highlight that children with a disability also are at increased risk of sexual abuse in childhood. Flemming et al (1997) link many of these family dynamics to the concepts of shame, secrecy and isolation stating that ‘the presence of violence and extreme conflict in the home are known to isolate families and perpetuate secrecy and shame, leading to further social isolation. Social and emotional isolation make a child more vulnerable to sexual abuse’ (p56).

In contrast with societal beliefs in the Victorian era, children from families that have a low socio-economic status are not at greater risk of sexual abuse (Leventhal, 1998; Fergusson et al, 1996, Oddone et al, 2001). However, this factor is linked with higher risk of physical abuse and neglect (Coulton et al, 2007; Sedlak et al, 2010; Collin-Vézina et al, 2013) which are the areas where the original Victorian charities focussed their attention. McGee et al (2002) citing Black et al. (2001) emphasise ‘the late child/early adolescent period as a particularly vulnerable time’ in respect of increased risk of experiencing abuse. Finkelhor et al (2014) also note this feature in a recent study examining the lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse. They used a pooled-sample from three similarly constructed studies run in 2003, 2008 and 2011 containing combined sample of 708 seventeen-year-old, 781 fifteen-year-old and 804 sixteen-year-old children (2014, p329). The study found:

...the experience of any sexual abuse/assault among females rose from 16.8% for 15-year-olds to 21.7% for

16- year-olds to 26.6% for 17-year-olds. For males, it rose from 4.3% at 15 years to 5.1% at 17 years

(Finkelhor et al. 2014, p331)

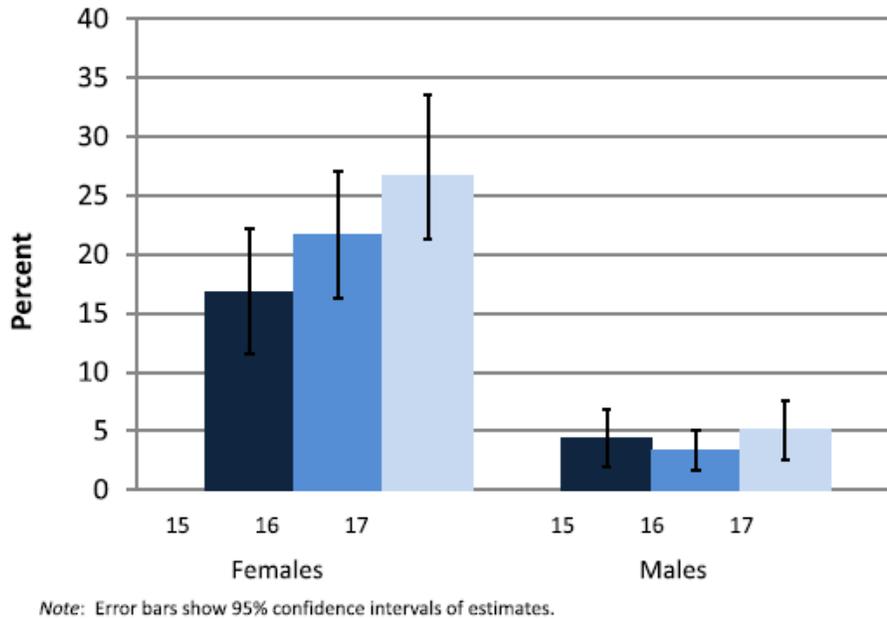


Figure 4: Percent of 15- to 17-year-olds experiencing any lifetime child sexual abuse/assault by gender and age (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner and Hamby (2014), p331)

This recent study adds weight to the concerns raised in the SAVI report in Ireland in 2002 and re-emphasises the findings of Leventhal (1998) almost two decades ago. The literature demonstrates that not only should we expect more disclosures in adulthood due to difficulties regarding disclosure and the impact of abuse, but also, we see that risk of abuse increases closer to the age of eighteen leading to more likelihood of disclosure in adulthood, if at all. Moving beyond prevalence, the following section examines the literature relating to the possible effects of sexual abuse in childhood.

## Effects of Abuse

While the effects of an experience of sexual abuse in childhood can be as individual as the person experiencing them there are common threads and sequelae related to an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Browne and Finkelhor (1986) remind us of this link with disclosure and warn that ‘effects may be due less to the experience itself than to later social reactions to disclosure’ (1986, p76). Staying with Finkelhor, the key starting point for any discussion of the literature relating to the effects of child sexual abuse must begin with his extensive work in the area; particularly his four-stage traumagenic model (1985).

Finkelhor’s seminal paper from 1987 compares and contrasts the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Model of examining trauma with his then newly developed Four-Stage Traumagenic model (1987). He argues in the opening abstract of that paper that the PTSD model of assessing trauma falls short when we are examining childhood sexual abuse. He explains that such a model ‘fails to account for all the symptoms...does not apply to all victims...and its explanation for the source of trauma does not fit with many types of sexual abuse’ (1987, p348).

Finkelhor proposes a four-stage model incorporating Traumatic Sexualisation, Stigmatisation, Betrayal and Powerlessness (1985). Finkelhor acknowledges that these dynamics are not unique to sexual abuse, but it is their occurrence together that makes sexual abuse different from other childhood trauma (1985, p530). ‘This model suggests that CSA alters a child’s cognitive and emotional orientation to the world and causes trauma by distorting their self-concept and affective capacities. This model underscores the issues of trust and intimacy that are particularly pronounced among victims of CSA’ (Collin Vézina et al, 2013, p3). Despite discussing many of these issues in respect of disclosure of abuse it is important here to set out what Finkelhor means by each of these stages and what possible effects relate to them:

### (i) Traumatic Sexualisation

- This refers to distortions in a child's sexuality and sexual attitudes shaped by a 'developmentally inappropriate and dysfunctional' environment. It can involve the exchange of gifts or attention in return for sexual behaviour and Finkelhor notes that instances where a child is enticed can result in more profound traumatic sexualisation (1987, p531).
- **Effects:** Sexual preoccupations (age inappropriate), aversion to sex, flashbacks and negative attitudes to sex (p534).

### (ii) Stigmatisation:

- This dynamic refers to distortions in the child's sense of value and self-worth. This can include feelings of shame, guilt and negative self-image which can be increased by pressures for secrecy. Finkelhor notes that such messages can come directly from the abuser but also from what the child hears and experiences within their environment and wider social structures.
- **Effects:** Isolation, tendency towards criminality, self-destructive, guilt, shame, low self-esteem (p535).

### (iii) Betrayal:

- This dynamic is a result of abuse by someone upon whom the child was dependent. Finkelhor explains that this is increased where the abuse is intra-familial or where the abuser is known to the child but can also be a dynamic when the child has come to depend or has been drawn in by a stranger.
- **Effects:** Dependency, trust issues, search for a redeeming relationship (risk of domestic violence), anger and hostility (pp535-536).

### (iv) Powerlessness:

- This dynamic refers to the child's lack of ability to control their situation, including powerlessness which can be increased by fear or lack of comprehension. Finkelhor notes that for powerlessness to be experienced 'force and threat are not necessary: any kind of situation in which a child feels trapped, if only by the realization of the consequences of disclosure, can create a sense of powerlessness' (1985, p532).
- **Effects:** Fear, anxiety, hyper-vigilance, phobias, poor coping skills and self-efficacy (p536).

Figure 5: Adapted from Finkelhor, 1987

Finkelhor notes that this model does not apply solely to the abusive experience itself but rather is an 'ongoing process' (1987, p538). He suggests that the model is useful in two other categories, namely the family's reaction to disclosure and, if relevant, any social or institutional responses to disclosure with many of the above effects potentially being replicated (1985, p539).

Browne and Finkelhor (1986), based on a review of 26 studies, present the most commonly reported effects of child sexual abuse as including 'depression and self-destructive behaviour, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward re-victimisation, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment' (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986, p66-70). Others listed were anxiety attacks, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, nervousness and extreme tension. However, depression was cited as the most common symptom among adults who have experiences of childhood abuse and Browne and Finkelhor state that the variable of child sexual abuse made an independent contribution to depression' (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986, p69). They suggest that experiences of child sexual abuse cause both initial (within 2 years) and long-term effects (1986, p66).

Beitchman et al present two papers reviewing both the short term (1991) and long term (1992) effects of child sexual abuse which provides us with an update to the Browne and Finkelhor (1986) analysis. Beitchman et al propose that due to the disparity in methodological approaches used in the studies they reviewed it is not possible to postulate the existence of a 'post-sexual abuse syndrome'; in other words, a group of symptoms that consistently occur together. They begin with a warning, now all too familiar in the field of CSA research, regarding the analysis of effects of abuse in that the literature contains too many methodological flaws, lack of control group studies and has tended not to distinguish between effects attributable to the abusive experience and those that may have been pre-existing or attributable to family-dynamics or the 'stress associated with disclosure' (1991, p538).

Their review of short-term effects (1991) breaks the effects down in terms of age of the child, dealing initially with effects within pre-school children, school-aged and on to adolescents. While studies are inconsistent they suggest that sexualised behaviour appears to be a consistent marker of an experience of child sexual abuse among both pre-school and school-aged children (1991, p544). They note that low academic performance has been cited in many studies but of those they reviewed none included a control group and so it is difficult to evidence a relationship to an abusive experience. They go on to add however that studies of adolescents do reveal evidence of depression, low self-esteem and suicidal behaviour and ideation (1991, p544) supporting some of Browne and Finkelhor's work (1986). They conclude their initial paper by examining some of the abuse-specific variables that may have impact upon later effects such as severity of abuse, age at onset, relationship to offender and abuse involving force. While they state that these variables are often not assessed to shed light on their independent contribution to outcome they are factors that are consistently associated with greater trauma (1991, p549).

Beitchman et al conclude their review of short-term effects and begin their review of long-term effects of sexual abuse by referencing what they call 'sleeper effects' 'of which the child and others are unaware, but which emerge with dramatic impact in adulthood' (1992, p102). They suggest that the adult ability 'to assess childhood events from a different psychological perspective' may be a cause of such 'sleeper effects' (p102). They go on to note that an understanding of the adult perspective is key to unravelling the full impact of sexual abuse. In introducing their review of the long-term effects, they again cite the lack of control-group studies leading to difficulty in evidencing a clear relationship between cause and effect.

Beitchman et al, referring to their initial review of short-term effects note that since 'sexualised behaviour is one of the few short-term effects that is consistently associated with CSA, and if continuity between short-term effects and long-term effects exists, disturbance in this domain should be evident in

adulthood' (1992, p103). This is supported within the research with many studies displaying an association; Browne and Finkelhor (1986); Meiselman (1978) showing 87% displaying various sexual behavioural issues; Briere (1984) presenting 40% of sample reporting issues regarding sexual adjustment; and just one study reporting a weak link (Fromuth, 1986). While association is supported within the review again there are issues regarding the establishment of a direct relationship between sexual abuse and later sexual functioning and behaviour (Beitchman et al. 1992, p105).

Beitchman et al (1992) again review common associated effects such as depression, suicidality, revictimization and personality disorder and ultimately resound their concerns that lack of control of variables makes it difficult to conclude a cause and effect regarding an experience of child sexual abuse. They do however highlight the following recurring themes; while a majority of studies at this time used samples of women there were higher associations with sexual dysfunction, anxiety, fear, depression and suicidal ideation amongst those who reported an experience of childhood abuse as opposed to those who did not; there is insufficient evidence to support a 'post-sexual abuse syndrome' or a link with personality disorder; it remains unclear what the relationship is between age at onset of abuse and effects but there is greater evidence in support of a link than to disprove a link; longer duration of abuse is associated with greater trauma as is abuse by a father or step-father and force is associated with greater negative outcomes but the ultimate effects of this variable is unknown (1992, p115).

Bringing us closer to contemporary research in this area Oddone et al (2001) reemphasised the disparity in prevalence studies regarding child sexual abuse and the lack of consistency in respect of research relating to the possible outcomes and effects of child sexual abuse. They conducted a meta-analysis of 37 studies screening for specific correlations between child sexual abuse and PTSD, depression, suicide, sexual promiscuity, victim-peer cycle and poor academic performance (2001). In summarising the literature in this area

Oddone et al propose that there are two main bodies of theory relating to the effects of childhood sexual abuse, these are (i) core symptom theories (syndromes); and (ii) multi-faceted models of traumatisation (multi-effects) (2001, pp18-19). We see from both Browne and Finkelhor (1986) and Beitchman et al (1991, 1992) there is little evidence, possible due to study disparity, to support the former of these theories. This makes it more important for services to be open to the presence of multiple effects and presentations within a population effected by abuse and a strong argument for consistent reviews within the research of those factors that are commonly associated with an experience of childhood abuse.

Oddone et al concluded that there is a:

143% (20/14 x 100) increase in risk of developing PTSD symptoms following CSA among the general population. Similarly, there is a 150% (21/14 x 100) increase in risk of becoming depressed or suicidal, a 100% (14/14 x 100) increase in risk of becoming sexually promiscuous, a 57% (8/14 x 100) increase in risk of engaging in the victim-perpetrator cycle, and a 71% (10/14 x 100) increase in risk of reducing one's academic performance. Thus, the magnitude of the effect of CSA on all the outcomes examined has substantial practical significance that requires immediate public attention and action.

(Oddone et al, 2001, p28)

As noted above, earlier research tended to be based on samples almost exclusively of women and so another important finding of Oddone's study was that fact that it found no significant difference in effect between male and female victims of abuse (Oddone et al, 2001, p32) and while they highlight the gaps in the literature in this area they conclude that there is compelling evidence establishing the negative effects of childhood sexual abuse. Oddone et al support the contention that there is little evidence to support a 'syndrome-

based' theory of sexual abuse effects. They conclude that 'CSA is associated with the development of PTSD and depression, as well as with suicide, sexual promiscuity, the victim-perpetrator cycle, and poor academic performance, regardless of victim age, gender, or socioeconomic status' (2001, p33).

Oddone et al (2001) found that there was no statistical difference in negative outcomes depending on the type of abuse, relationship to the abuser, the number of incidents of abuse and the age of onset of the abuse. They followed this by stating however that they theorized that chronicity of abuse should be linked to at least some outcomes and they called on researchers in the field of child sexual abuse research to resolve the methodological flaws between studies (2001, p31). In contrast, in a modern return to the issue, O'Leary et al. (2010) begin their study with the hypothesis that severity of abuse, relationship to the abuser, age at onset of abuse, duration and frequency are positively associated with mental health symptoms. Their hypothesis was somewhat disproved in that, like Kendall-Kendell-Tackett et al (1993) and Ruggiero (2000), they found no relationship between age at onset of abuse and mental health outcomes. Steine et al (2017) have also highlighted the absence of a significant relationship between 'age at first abuse, biological parent perpetrator, trust, manipulation, positive attention, penetrative abuse' and later Post traumatic stress symptoms (2017, p289). O'Leary et al (2010) did find, however, that adults in the their 30s-40s were more likely to report mental health symptoms than younger cohorts. They pose many possible reasons for this but one is potentially the delay in memory recall of child sexual abuse until mid-life (O'Leary et al, 2010). They conclude by stating that 'children and adult survivors need to know that, although they may have been unable to tell at the time of the abuse, discussing their experience as soon as they are able may help protect them against poor mental health or may lessen mental health symptoms' (O'Leary et al, 2010, pp286-287).

In 2009, Maniglio conducted a systematic review of the health consequences associated with an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Maniglio begins the

paper by providing a caution much the same as those cited in respect of the disclosure literature, in that variation of methods, sample and measurement has caused a variable pool of research regarding the effects of child sexual abuse on health leading to ‘potentially interpretative difficulties, mistaken beliefs, or confusion among all professionals who turn to this literature for guidance’ (2009, p647). While Maniglio ultimately urges caution when utilizing studies regarding effects of child sexual abuse his systematic review did find that:

‘there is evidence that across methodologies, samples, and measures survivors of child sexual abuse are significantly at risk of a wide range of health problems, i.e. psychotic symptomatology (especially paranoid ideation), depression, anxiety (including posttraumatic stress and obsessive–compulsive symptomatology), dissociation, eating disorders, somatization, personality disorders (especially borderline personality disorder), self-esteem and self-concept impairment, suicidal and self-injurious ideation or behavior, substance abuse, sexual dysfunction, engagement in high-risk sexual behaviors (such as unprotected sexual intercourse, sex with multiple partners, early involvement in sexual activity, and prostitution), social impairment, interpersonal problems (including feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or discomfort when interacting with others), hostility, anger, perpetration of sexual abuse, intelligence or learning impairment, revictimization, chronic noncyclical pelvic pain, and non-epileptic seizures’

(2009, p654).

While the above studies are critical in respect of interrogating the overall data relating to the effects of abuse and are gleaned from the upper ranks of academic data in the form of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, studies exploring the lived experiences of those affected by abuse present a more nuanced and grounded view of the effects of childhood sexual abuse. Dorahy and Clearwater (2012) produced a small (n=7), in-depth, qualitative analysis of

the lived experiences of adult males with histories of child sexual abuse with a focus on the concepts of shame and guilt as outcomes of an experience of childhood sexual abuse. In their study, they discuss participants speaking of 'self-as-shame', a fear of exposure and the desire to conceal their abusive experiences largely due to 'the unpredictable responses of others to disclosures' (2012, p163).

Participants in the study also described instances of 'not being believed by health and mental health professionals and having their disclosure attributed to their psychological difficulties or histrionics' (2012, p165) echoing the example relating to Sigmund Freud's theories from the previous chapter. Dorahy and Clearwater citing Spiegel (2003) state that 'the pervasiveness of social and professional denial experienced by participants and the silencing effect of shame suggests health and mental health professionals need to be aware of the existence, dynamics, and effects of male sexual abuse' (2012, p171). Among the consequences attributed to an experience of childhood sexual abuse the adults in this study spoke about being socially isolated and avoiding contact with others due to fear of exposure of their abuse. 'Connectedness' to others was described as short lived. Anger was resultant from 'abuse ques' and minor frustrations and participants recounted engaging in 'emotional numbing' and 'severing' to cope with intrusive thoughts caused by their experiences (Dorahy and Clearwater, 2012).

Experiences of childhood sexual abuse have also been associated with suicide. Plunkett et al (2001) found, using a longitudinal study using a sample of young people (n=183), that those with a history of child sexual abuse had suicide rates 10.7 to 13 times that of the national Australian average. Of their sample 32% of the cohort with experiences of child sexual abuse had attempted suicide, 6 died and 3 of these deaths were directly attributable to suicide. There were no deaths within the control group (2001). The authors of this research again echo the difficulty in controlling for other variables relating to abuse and family functioning and do also highlight that age of their sample is an age where

young people at higher risk of suicide irrespective of an experience of sexual abuse (2001, p265). Similar rates of suicidal ideation were noted elsewhere (Martin et al, 2004) and also in an adult male population with histories of childhood sexual abuse (O’Leary and Gould, 2009). While their study solely concerned adult males, O’Leary and Gould conclude that social work and mental health professionals ‘cannot afford to overlook the long-term psychological risks that are associated with sexual abuse’ (2009, p962) (See also Pritchard and King, 2004).

In an Irish context, Barrett and Kamiya (2014) provide an important, and under researched, insight into the economic effects of abuse. They use *The Irish Longitudinal Study on Aging* (TILDA) statistical dataset which collected information from Irish citizens aged 50 and over relating to social, economic and health circumstances. Participants were also asked if they were ever sexually abused before the age of eighteen. Barrett and Kamiya were able to use these data to present how an incidence of sexual abuse in one’s childhood can have economic as well as psychological effects throughout the life course (Barrett and Kamiya, 2012). They found that adults who have experienced sexual abuse in their childhood are ‘almost four times more likely to be out of the labour force due to sickness and disability’ (See also Letourneau, Brown, Fang, Hassan and Mercy, 2018). The study also reveals that such adults are more likely to live alone and not to have married. Further to this, if they had married during their life they were more than twice as likely to be separated or divorced as the population who had not experienced childhood sexual abuse (Barrett and Kamiya, 2012, p13). This contemporary Irish-based evidence also supports previous literature reviewed in that it establishes that child sexual abuse occurs right throughout the socio-economic range and that no individual characteristic can be attributed to such an experience. The Victorian contention that child sexual abuse was a phenomenon of the lower classes (Olafson et al, 1993) is truly dismissed:

In the case of CSA, we cannot see that there  
might be an unobservable individual

characteristic which makes it more likely to have been a victim of CSA and to have poorer labour market outcomes after the age of 50. Similarly, the available evidence would suggest that CSA is distributed across all socioeconomic groups (Ferguson, Lynsky, and Horwood, 1996; Putnam, 2003; Stein and Barrett-Connor, 2000).

(Barrett and Kamiya, 2012, p9)

Barrett and Kamiya conclude by noting that an experience of childhood sexual abuse ‘affects people in ways beyond depression and anxiety and that these other effects must be understood and treated’ (Barrett and Kamiya, 2012, p16). Therefore, while Browne and Finkelhor (1986), amongst others, have presented the potential direct effects of childhood sexual abuse it is established from the above literature how such effects impact on an adults’ interaction with their wider environment. This is crucial when considering adults who chooses to disclose to social work services.

### Child Sexual Abuse as an Adverse Childhood Experience

Viewing child sexual abuse as an adverse childhood experience lends weight to the argument for recognition of its long-term effects, and the need for health professionals, including social workers, to inquire about childhood adversity and to be cognisant of it in terms of interventions being offered. Finkelhor (2019), while ultimately in support of the ACEs debate, does however offer a cautionary note in respect of the current emphasis on ACEs. It is important that we do not view the effects and potential outcomes of child sexual abuse in isolation. Sexual abuse does not occur ‘within a vacuum’ (Finkelhor, 1998, p1865) but within an environment which may by its very nature contain other sources of victimisation and abuse. It also occurs within ‘a climate of inadequate supervision or excessive dependency-needs that make a child more

vulnerable to sexual exploitation’ (Liem and Boudewyn, 1999, p1153). It is also true that the act of sexual abuse itself will contain elements of physical and emotional abuse. Finkelhor et al (2009) argue that it is prudent to assess the level of ‘polyvictimisation’ which effects the individual instead of focussing on one, albeit complex and serious, issue. Polyvictimisation refers to four or more sources of victimisation within a given year (Finkelhor et al, 2007). Liem and Boudewyn (1999) echoed this warning stating that ‘CSA researchers cannot ignore contextual factors in the backgrounds of individuals with CSA histories when seeking to understand their long-term adjustment’ (1999, p1153).

In 1998, Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz and Marks published a paper concerning the effects of what they called adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) upon health in adult life. Their results further established the long-term and wide-ranging effects of trauma and abuse in childhood. The ACEs they included in their study included psychological, physical and sexual abuse, violence against a mother, living in a household where there is substance abuse, mental ill health or suicide and where there has been incarceration (1998). They found ‘a strong dose response relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults’ (1998, p251). Akin to Barrett and Kamiya’s research highlighting the effect of childhood sexual abuse on economic outcomes, Metzler, Merrick, Klevens, Ports, and Ford (2017) also found links between ACEs and subsequent impact on school completion, adult education, employment and income. As with the long-term outcomes of childhood sexual abuse, this is not surprising given the likelihood of higher levels of family stress and conflict and collateral trauma present in settings where child abuse tends to occur (Alaggia and Kirshenbaum, 2005). In a UK and Irish context Spratt and colleagues (2009; 2010; 2012; 2014) conducted research in this area and moved beyond a focus on the individual effects to examine families with multiple problems (Spratt 2009; 2011). McGavock and Spratt (2014) note that those children who engage with child protection services are likely to have experienced higher rates of ACEs than those in the general

population (2014, p671). They warn that social work services' often singular focus on referred issues can miss such contextual and environmental influences.

Finkelhor, Shattuck, Tener, and Hamby (2015) argue for the potential addition of 'ACEs' to the original screening tool and make the case that more contemporary issues in child welfare and protection are perhaps overlooked by the original Felitti study. They present research using data from the American National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence 2014 which highlighted that issues such a peer victimisation, peer isolation and community violence added significantly to prediction of both mental and physical health outcomes (2015). Finkelhor et al make the salient point that as a society we should strive to address all forms of child maltreatment irrespective of their long-term outcomes but that the ACEs debate or movement does appear to be part of the 'process of educating and research childhood adversities' (2015, p20). In a recent paper, Finkelhor (2018) continues to question the level of 'excitement' over a study (ACEs) that establishes that there are long-term effects of childhood adversity when this has been established for years. He highlights the uses of the study but argues that it is only valuable if resources and interventions are in place to back it up and that focus should be placed on the eradication of childhood adversity as opposed to interventions to identify its potential effects (2018). Dube (2018), while agreeing with Finkelhor, argues that the inclusion of ACEs in the medical model of screening provides healthcare professionals with the individual's own views and reporting on their childhood experiences which may be beneficially in a system that focusses on objective symptoms, or an etic view, of health care issues (2018).

In addition to the body of research regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences further studies have been conducted concerning the change in brain architecture, or genetic changes, attributable to childhood experiences of abuse (See Fox, Levitt and Nelson, 2010; Neigh, Gillespie and Nemeroff, 2009). These studies argue that significant trauma at an early developmental stage can lead to a change in the brain's fight or flight responses which can affect later

life. While important to note this emerging science of epigenetics, as it is called, and brain development it is a research area that lies outside the scope of this thesis. These new areas of research are helpful in building a better picture of what contributes to the effects of abuse and how trauma and abuse impact upon the individual we can refer to Browne and Finkelhor's paper from 1986 to temper or endeavours:

...there is an unfortunate tendency in interpreting the effects of sexual abuse... to over emphasise long-term impact as the ultimate criterion. Effects seem to be considered less "serious" if their impact is transient and disappears in the course of development. However, this tendency to assess everything in terms of its long-term effect betrays an "adulto-centric" bias. Adult traumas such as rape are not assessed ultimately in terms of whether they will have an impact on old age: They are acknowledged to be painful and alarming events whether other impact lasts 1 year or 10. Similarly, childhood traumas should not be dismissed because no "long-term effects" can be demonstrated. Child sexual abuse needs to be recognised as a serious problem of childhood, if only for the immediate pain, confusion, and upset that can ensue.

(Browne and Finkelhor, 1986, p76)

## Disclosure

Disclosure is critical to our understanding of the prevalence of child sexual abuse and therefore, critical to our understanding of child sexual abuse itself. It is important to understand what is meant by ‘disclosure’, how the act of disclosure impacts those who do disclose and why, as the research tells us, so many do not disclose and remain unrecognised, below the surface.

Campbell and Gresson et al (2015), consistent with others such as Ulman (2010) and Ahrens (2006) define disclosure ‘as the act of informing someone about an assault, most typically an informal support provider’(p825). Tener and Murphy (2015) also citing Ulman (2003) state ‘that disclosure refers to telling another person about the abuse either formally or informally, voluntarily or in response to others’ invitations to tell’ (p391). While the Oxford English Dictionary defines disclosure as the ‘act of making something known that was secret’ (Oxford Living Dictionaries accessed online). While these definitions are correct, they may not be sufficient to fully encompass the process and fluidity of disclosure. Ramona Alaggia argues, with support of Jones (2000), that:

‘the term “disclosure” in itself is fraught with difficulty. It has been argued that the concept of disclosure is fundamentally inadequate because of its general lack of specificity and the enormous variation in the way the term is used’

(2004, p1214).

Alaggia notes that ‘the word “disclosure” is more commonly used in reference to a child’s reporting of abuse, while “telling” is more often used when adults share their abuse experiences’ (2004, p1214) (See also Alaggia et al, 2017). This view of disclosure is also supported by Burke-Draucker and Martsolf (2008) when they examine adult disclosures as acts of ‘storying child sexual abuse’ with elements of ‘accounting’ and ‘meaning-making’ occurring during

this process (2008). It will be shown how this framing of disclosure is echoed in the findings of this research.

Collin Vézina, Daigneault and Hébert (2013) in examining lessons learned from child sexual abuse research state that ‘disclosure is a delicate and sensitive process that is influenced by several factors, including implicit or explicit pressure for secrecy, feelings of responsibility or blame, feelings of shame or embarrassment, or fear of negative consequences’ (2013, p2). Gagnier and Collin Vézina (2016) citing similar literature to Campbell and Gleeson, but with Alaggia (2010) and Hunter (2011) as critical additions, state that ‘disclosure should be seen as an ongoing process between an individual’s first disclosure and all subsequent disclosures. It cannot be seen as a singular event, since victims will often disclose to several people at various points in their lives’ (2016, p223). It has been argued that disclosure ‘can better be thought of as a process that unfolds over time in different contexts and not as a singular event (Reitsema and Grietens, 2016, p331). This view of disclosure as a process over time is also proffered by Sally Hunter in her scholarship on disclosures of childhood abuse by adults (2010; 2011). Hunter found that most participants from her study gradually moved ‘from not telling [as children] towards telling as adults’ (2011, p167). She argues that this demonstrates disclosure to be a developmental process that changes over time. She also discusses distinctions between childhood disclosure and adult disclosure (see also Agar and Read, 2002) stating that ‘disclosure patterns in childhood are different from those in adulthood in that they are more likely to include behavioural manifestations of distress, such as acting out, and to exclude disclosures triggered by recovered memories (2011, p168).

Viewing disclosure upon this form of life-course continuum as a process that ‘may continue in a ‘stop-start’ fashion throughout the life span’ (McElvaney et al, 2012, p1169), playing out over time, potentially in diverse settings to an array of recipients, the literature also argues that disclosure should be viewed as a ‘dialogical’ and ‘inter-relational process’ (Alaggia et al, 2017). Reitsema and

Grietens (2016), exploring linkages between the life course and inter-relational perspectives, suggest that disclosure ‘begins the moment the abuse starts, as disclosure is ultimately linked to the context in which the abuse occurs’ (2016, p331). Continuing this line, Sarsoli et al (2008) state that ‘studies of female survivors have suggested that disclosure-related events may be even more strongly related to the long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse than are the characteristics of the abuse itself’ (2008, p333).

Reitsema and Grietens (2016) suggest that an ‘aspect that has received too little attention is the interactional nature of disclosure. When the term disclosure is understood as the act of a child telling someone, it is conceptualized as a one-way process, as individually generated transmissions of information (MacMartin, 1999; Staller and Nelson-Gardell, 2005). ‘Such a unidirectional view does not recognize the relational and social-interactional context of disclosure’ (Reitsema and Grietens, 2016 p331):

‘To increase our knowledge on the dialogical process of disclosure, we need to consider the many factors that may influence whether and how this process unfolds over time throughout different interactions. Such a perspective on disclosure can provide critical information to improve efforts to detect child sexual abuse and provide support, treatment, and protection to these children’

(2016, p331).

Easton (2013) again considering the life course and relational elements suggests that ‘the disclosure process is often a complex phenomenon that unfolds across the life course (Easton, 2011) and is influenced by factors such as a survivor’s life stage, social network, and personal resources’ (p350). Easton argues that ‘using a lifespan perspective is important not only for gathering information during assessment, but it can also be useful for treatment of male survivors of CSA’ (p351).

### *Types of Disclosure*

The literature establishes that disclosure of an experience of childhood sexual abuse is not a straightforward static event but is inter-relational and even individual instances should be viewed in the context of a life experience. Alaggia, in her study from 2004, broke ground in charting how such individual incidents of disclosure may occur. Alaggia conducted 24 face-to-face interviews with male and females who had experienced childhood sexual abuse to assess the processes of disclosure. Based upon these data she formulated that disclosure took many forms. Her study reinforced previous research by Sorenson and Snow (1991), Campis et al (1993), Keary and Fitzpatrick (1994) and Mian et al (1986) which had already established ‘purposeful’, ‘accidental’ and ‘elicited/prompted’ forms of disclosure. To this she added emergent categories of ‘behavioural’, ‘purposefully withheld’ and ‘triggered’ as further categories of how disclosure takes place. The following table from Alaggia’s study outlines what each category refers to:

Types of disclosure	Description/definition	Previous reference
Purposeful	Intentional disclosure of the sexual abuse through direct verbal means.	Campis et al. (1993); Sorensen and Snow (1991)
Accidental	Third-party detection through witnessing, physical evidence and symptoms, which results in verification of abuse.	Campis et al. (1993); Mian et al. (1986)
Elicited/prompted	Disclosure through investigative interviewing, counseling, art, play or talk therapy, supportive environments.	Keary and Fitzpatrick (1994); Sorensen and Snow (1991)
Behavioral	Victim intentionally attempts to tell through behavior, non-verbal communication, or indirect verbal hints.	Emergent category
Purposefully withheld	Despite opportunities or interventions to disclose, the victim chooses not to tell. Includes false denial.	Emergent category
Triggered	Disclosure precipitated by recall of heretofore forgotten or repressed memories of the sexual abuse.	Emergent category

*Figure 6: Alaggia’s Types of Disclosure: Established and Emergent (2004, p1221)*

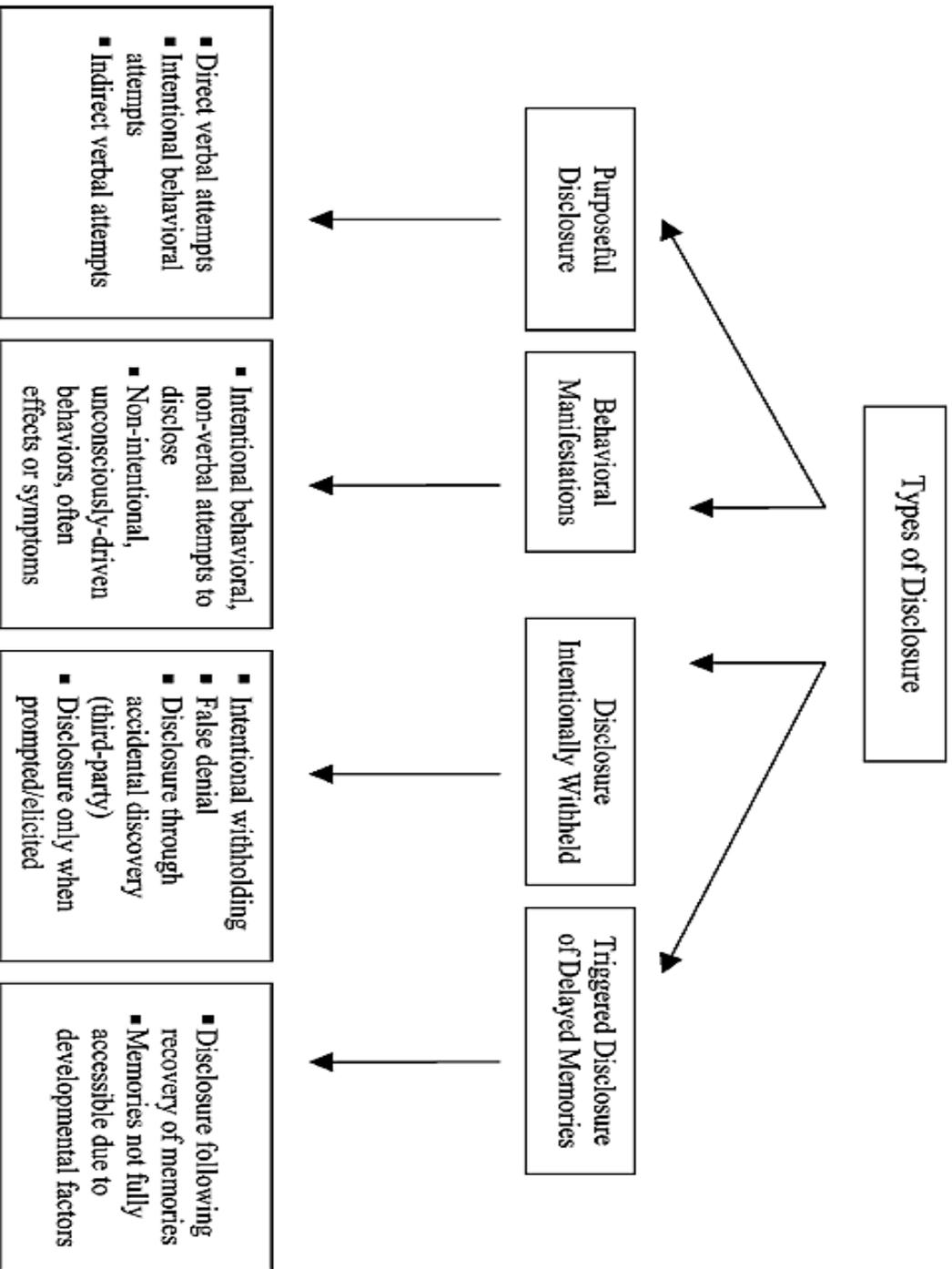


Figure 7: Alaggia's Framework of Disclosure Types (2004, p1221)

Alaggia suggests that ‘perhaps the most problematic types of disclosure are behavioural manifestations, whereby the victim does not directly tell about their victimization verbally’ (2004, p1223). She states that while such behavioural manifestations are more likely in childhood, they are not restricted to childhood and may occur at any stage of the life course (2004). Disclosure in the context of childhood sexual abuse is therefore an act, as a child or adult, of telling someone about the experience, whether this is an official party or peer or family member. It is also a developmental process that plays out over the life course and one which can take many forms (Alaggia, 2004). Most importantly and of critical importance for this research is that it is a dialogical and inter-relational phenomenon that mimics and relates to the experience of abuse itself (Alaggia et al, 2017; Sarsoli et al, 2008; Spaccarelli, 1994).

#### *How Adults Tell: Experiences of Disclosure*

‘Acknowledging and disclosing the memories, thoughts, and feelings associated with abuse and trauma have long been viewed by clinicians as important aspects of healing (Sarsoli et al, 2008, p333). However, there are many factors discussed throughout the literature that impact upon disclosure or the ability to disclose. Alaggia (2005), presenting a gender analysis of disclosure, draws together much of the research in this area and suggests that ‘disclosures are often tentative, involve some telling and then retracting, can be partial or full, and occur over time’ (2005, p456). She goes on to state that ‘specific factors seem to operate in individual situations of disclosure’ including ‘age, gender, relationship to the perpetrator, family dynamics, availability of support (especially parental), and cultural considerations have all been found to play some part in disclosure’ (2005, p456).

Tener and Murphy (2015) suggest that when choosing a recipient for the disclosure the individual disclosing requires a certain level of intimacy to ‘feel comfortable sharing his or her story (Del Castillo and Wright, 2009). Survivors

seem to search for the “safe and trusted space,” where they can tell their story without danger (Chouliara et al., 2011)’ (p396). Collin-Vézina et al (2015) in researching the literature found that ‘with regard to the choice of confidants, Malloy, Brubacher, and Lamb (2013) examined 204 forensic interviews of alleged sexual abuse of children aged 5–13 years and identified that mothers and peers were the most common recipients of disclosure, and that most children who disclosed had told more than one individual’ (2015, p124). Jonzon and Lindblad (2004) support this contention charting the types of reactions experienced by those disclosing:

Mothers (18 reports) were the most common first-disclosure receivers in childhood, responding in 33% with positive reactions, and therapists (33 reports) were the most common receivers in adulthood, with 85% responding with positive reactions. Partners (17 reports) were the second most common receivers in adulthood, with 65% responding with positive reactions. The third most common first-disclosure receivers in adulthood were friends (11 reports), for whom the highest frequency of all concerning positive reactions was described (91%)’

(2004, p195).

Easton (2013) in a similar vein represented his findings in the following format, firmly supporting the role of mothers as prominent recipients of disclosures. Easton’s study included survey data collected from 487 men ‘with histories of CSA’ (2013, p347):

Variable	Childhood		Adulthood (n = 448)
	Mother (n = 63)	Another (n = 92)	
Believed (% yes)	57.4	78.8	96.9
Supported (% yes)	28.6	33.7	83.5
Protected (% yes)	35.6	30.8	48.1
Support index (mean/SD)	1.25 (1.28)	1.47 (1.12)	2.30 (0.80)

Figure 8: Easton's (2013) Measures of Support after Disclosure

Munzer et al (2016) note however that 'while mothers and peers are the most likely to be told' few of the participants in their study (42 children and adolescents) had 'reported to a professional or to official authorities' (2016, p366). Alaggia sums up the complexity that this potentially creates when professional services do become involved suggesting that:

'the reality is that many victims of CSA first disclose to family, friends or partners who do not have the training to know how to respond to this information. Thus, professionals can expect to work with children and adults who may have already told various people over time through an investigation, a conversation, or after a prolonged period of silence. By this point, the victim may have experienced a variety of responses, both supportive and non-supportive. It is important to bear in mind that passage of time does not necessarily mitigate the negative effects of child sexual abuse. Victims who disclose in adulthood should not necessarily be assumed to have worked through some of their victimization simply because of their developmental maturity'

(Alaggia, 2004, p1222)

We see from the literature that the quality of response to the disclosure can play a significant part in the life of the person who has experienced child sexual abuse. Easton (2013) states that 'because disclosure is an interpersonal process, the quality of the responses received after disclosure can be critical to the

survivor's well-being. He found that 'unhelpful responses to disclosure were related to more mental distress' (p351) and that 'receiving an unhelpful response to telling may undermine the survivor's ability to process and understand the abuse, thereby contributing to negative feelings (e.g., guilt, shame, isolation, anger)' (ibid, p351). Reitsema and Grietens (2016) add to this stating:

the reaction of the person to whom the disclosure is made has an impact on the consequences of child sexual abuse (Lovett, 2004; Ullman, 2003). The nature of the response to disclosure has been found to be associated with the severity of psychological symptoms and psychopathology in childhood and also remains a critical event in later adjustment (Arata, 1998; Everill and Waller, 1995; Lange et al., 1999; Lovett, 2004)

(2016, p334).

While another feature that caused difficulty was 'the relational belief that others knew and simply were not acting on the knowledge was difficult for them' (Sarsoli et al, 2008, p340).

### *Gender*

A prominent finding from reviewing the literature in respect of disclosure is how the issue of gender mediates when and if disclosure takes place, what form the disclosure takes and the possible impact of such a disclosure. The gender analysis conducted by Alaggia (2005) found that 'three themes emerged for men that inhibited or precipitated disclosure for reasons related to gender: (a) fear of being viewed as homosexual, (b) feelings profound of stigmatization or isolation because of the belief that boys are rarely victimized, and (c) fear of becoming an abuser, which acted as a precipitant for disclosure' (2005, p461). It also appeared that men did not wish to be viewed as 'victims' of sexual abuse

as they perceived this a predominantly female experience and ‘an undesirable trait’ (Alaggia, 2005, p462). In terms of females who experienced childhood sexual abuse, Alaggia found that two predominant themes were identified in respect of affecting disclosure. These related to issues in respect of who was responsible for the abuse leading to issues regarding who would be blamed or believed (Alaggia, 2005). Alaggia found that ‘while both men and women feared being blamed or disbelieved, women recounted this fear as overriding their decision to tell’ (2005, p463).

The male fear of being viewed as homosexual arose in many studies examining disclosure, including this research (to be discussed in findings chapter). Dorahy and Clearwater (2012) suggest that ‘male survivors face challenges that differ from females, largely in relation to stereotypes and expectations of masculinity placed on men. The possible consequences of this are highlighted by Sarsoli et al (2008) citing a study by Ullman and Filipas (2005) noting that ‘men were not only less likely than women to have disclosed their abuse but also less likely to have encountered positive reactions (p334). Sarsoli et al found that the male experience of disclosure fell in to three categories or types. ‘These domains were (a) personal (i.e., what they personally could or could not do or handle, or how they would feel if they disclosed, etc.), (b) relational (what someone else would do if they disclosed, or what someone else needed to do, say, or allow in order for disclosure to occur, etc.), and (c) sociocultural (abstract rules about what was appropriate and normal for men to experience, feel, and discuss)’ (2008, p339). Studies have shown that this socio-cultural dimension, or perception, of masculinity can lead to males feeling ‘weak’ or potentially cause secrecy and concealment of the abuse, thereby delaying or prohibiting disclosures by males (Gagnier et al, 2016; Denov, 2004; Speigel, 2003).

## *Delay*

Delay in disclosing an experience of childhood sexual abuse is well established in the literature as being a common experience of those affected (Gagnier and Collin-Vézina, 2016; Alaggia, 2005, 2010; McElvaney et al., 2012; O’Leary and Barber, 2008). Rates of delay vary between studies. Alaggia (2004) notes that research that examines the delay between abusive experience and disclosure, or ‘latency to disclosure’ ‘often report a wide range of time between victimization and telling’ (2004, p1215). What is clear is that not only is delay common but that prolonged delay is frequent. In a study by Hébert, Tourigny, Cyr, McDuff, and Joly (2009) nearly 60% of their sample delayed disclosure for more than 5 years after the first episode. While in a study by Alaggia 58% delayed disclosure until adulthood with an overall trend towards delaying (2005, p460).

Jonzon and Lindblad (2004) in examining disclosure, reactions and social support found that the literature had established that ‘closeness to the perpetrator, multiple perpetrators, age at onset, and severe abuse have been shown to influence this delay (Arata, 1998; Kellogg and Hoffman, 1997; Lange et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2000) (2004, p191). Jonzon and Lindblad conducted their study using questionnaires with 122 adult women who had reported experiences of child sexual abuse. In terms of delay they found that ‘most of the survivors waited an average of 21 years until disclosing during adulthood (2004, p194). A mean of 3-18 years is however established by the research over all (Alaggia, 2010, p32). Alaggia (2004) adds that ‘delayed disclosures are also linked to repressed, recovered, or delayed memories (Flathman, 1999; Pope and Brown, 1996)’ (2004, p1215). While the literature predominantly attributes the feature of delay to negative factors MacIntosh et al (2016) citing a study by Anderson and Huddleston (2012) suggest that ‘delayed memory recovery or motivated forgetting could serve as a protective factor for children who have

experienced CSA until they are able to consciously integrate the traumatic experience' (2016, p57).

### *Family Dynamics*

Disclosure is an inter-relational phenomenon; the telling of someone about the abuse experienced (Alaggia, 2010; Hunter, 2011; Easton, 2013, Tener and Murphy, 2015). The literature has also established that the received, perceived or anticipated reaction to a disclosure can be critical in terms of future harm and or further disclosure (Tener and Murphy, 2015; Jonzon and Lindblad, 2004; Easton, 2013). The common feature of an abuser being part of an intrafamilial, or wider social network means that family dynamics can often play a significant role in disclosure, support and future traumatisation for those affected by abuse. The research has established that closeness to perpetrator is a factor commonly associated with delayed or withheld disclosure (Jonzon and Lindblad, 2004) with issues regarding trust, loyalty and power all potentially impacting upon an individual's decisions to disclose (Mian et al., 1986; Reitsema and Grietens, 2016; Anderson, 2016). Such decisions can also often be based upon expected reactions from parents or caregivers with negative responses potentially leading to 'delayed, non-spontaneous, and indirect disclosure to a non-parent figure' (Hershkowitz, 2007, p120) (See also Gonzales et al., 1993; Lawson and Chaffin, 1992; Palmer et al., 1999; Somer and Szwarcberg, 2001).

Alaggia and Kirshenbaum (2005) conducted a qualitative study which identified a number of specific family dynamics which may impact upon an individual's ability to disclose an experience of childhood sexual abuse. In presenting an initial review of the literature they again highlight the significance of closeness to the perpetrator but also issues such as cultural taboos and negative attitudes about sexuality (2005, p228). A thematic analysis of the findings from their substantive study identified four major themes; rigidly-fixed, patriarchy-based gender roles in the family; the presence of

family violence; closed, indirect communication and, finally, social isolation (2005). We see that these themes, or family traits, somewhat echo the ACES literature discussed previously in that ‘violence against a mother’ was listed as one of the originally ACES in Felitti et al’s 1998 study. Alaggia and Kirshenbaum’s study also re-emphasises Finkelhor’s important point that child sexual abuse does not occur in a vacuum (1998) and is often accompanied by other forms of victimisation. Alaggia and Kirshenbaum reported that their participants ‘reported co-occurring forms of family violence’ (2005, p230) and finding that is also echoed by Collin-Vézina et al (2015) where their study, discussed below, identified ‘violence and dysfunction within the family’ as being a barrier to disclosure (2015).

Alaggia and Kirshenbaum’s study is also significant in that they present the potential family dynamics that may affect disclosure within the individual’s wider socio-ecological spheres. They cite Butler (1982) in discussing the potential cultural silence that may impact upon an individual’s capacity to disclose, highlighting the significance of ‘prevailing attitudes that treat family matters as private and not intended for public intervention’ (2005, p231). This speaks back to discussions of Irish cultural attitudes and responses to child sexual abuse, as discussed in the context chapter, and further highlights the ability of such attitudes and norms to impact upon family dynamics and ultimately upon an individual’s ability to disclose. In a more recent synopsis of the literature Reitsema and Grietens (2016) re-emphasise these critical points and note that:

‘several interaction patterns have been identified to be typical for families in which sexual abuse occurs. These families tend to be more socially isolated, more controlling and less cohesive, have more problems coping with stress and adapting, exhibit poor communication and high conflict, and often display rigid traditional family values (Alexander and Lupfer, 1987; Alexander and Schaeffer, 1994; Dadds, Smith, Webber, and Robinson, 1991; Draucker, 1996; Trepper, Niedner, Mika, and Barrett, 1996). Such

dynamics may also influence the disclosure process.

(Reitsema and Grietens, 2016, p332)

### *Facilitators and Barriers*

‘Examining the variety of barriers and obstacles to disclosure allows us to see where the barriers could be removed, perhaps increasing the likelihood for intervention during childhood’ (Sarsoli, et al, 2008, p343). This study examines adult’s experiences of disclosure to social work services with a view to exploring the facilitators and barriers to making such disclosures. Much research has been conducted in charting the facilitators and barriers to disclosure in a general sense, less so in terms of disclosure to professional services and none in respect of adult disclosures to social work services, not to mention Child Protection Services in the Republic of Ireland. It is critical however to lay out some of the literature in this field, to provide a picture of the general and established barriers that individuals face regarding disclosure of an abusive experience. While much of the research focusses on disclosure by children and adolescent it is relevant due to the fact that the adults involved in this study have come through those periods or life before arriving, as adults, at a social work service.

In keeping with Hunter (2011) and others’ calls to examine disclosure as a life-long, fluid, process Sarsoli et al (2008) note that barriers to disclosure can change and vary over the life-course. Gagnier and Collin Vézina (2016) reviewing the literature comment that ‘personal barriers linked to cognitive awareness tended to be prevalent in childhood, as were relational barriers due to family dynamics. Sociocultural barriers surfaced more often later in life, when confronted with norms regarding masculinity, victimization, and abuse based on social as well as their own cultural values’ (2016, p224). In the original study Sarsoli et al note that even while some personal barriers can be

surmounted further difficulties in a wider social context in later life can be experienced. They note that ‘barriers to disclosure exist on multiple levels of experience; the intensity of these barriers and the ways they can overlap highlight how complicated disclosure can be’ (2008, p341). Tener and Murphy (2015) offer a useful insight in to how barriers and facilitators change over the life course:

...the transition to adulthood brings new challenges and introduces the survivors to new surroundings, including individuals or groups (formal and informal) who are not aware of the survivor’s story of abuse. To disclose the abuse can mean bringing the abused childhood world into the current life, possibly contaminating it forever

(Tener andand Murphy, 2010, p391)

They highlight the fear of receiving a negative response to disclosure, fear of not being believed or emotionally harmed and in addition to the family dynamics discussed above, they proffer that this fear exists for adults and children alike in variable social and interpersonal situations. Donalek (2001) warns that such fear can often be overwhelming. Other commonly cited barriers are issues regarding anxiety, shame, self-blame, loss of control and guilt (Dorahy and Clearwater, 2012; Alaggia, 2004; Ulman et al, 2010; Draucker and Martself, 2008; Tener and Murphy, 2015; Sanderson, 2006). ‘Whether to disclose or not must be faced each time the adult meets a new situation. Each new social system—formal or informal—and each new relationship—short or long term—necessitates the decision’ (Tener and Murphy, 2010, p392). Disclosure may also be impeded where ‘supportive community members are not available, or not trained in sensitive responses’ (Alaggia et al, 2017). Ultimately, if the risks associated with telling are greater than the potential benefits, the disclosure will not occur (Alaggia, 2005; Fisher, Goff, Nadler, and Chinsky, 1988).

Hunter (2011) examined disclosure as a life-long process by interviewing 9 men and 13 women using narrative research methodologies. She found that 17 participants did not tell anyone about what happened to them as children (2011, p162). She found that the main barriers for these individuals related to fear, shame and stigma. Hunter's findings showed that experiences of fear related primarily to girls while shame emerged as a predominantly male experience. Stigma was discussed by both males and females. In terms of fear, Hunter presents themes relating to fear of being punished if they disclosed; fear of consequences for the family and fear of not being believed all of which acted as barriers to disclosing. Themes related to shame, the predominantly male experience, were shame about hidden homosexuality; shame about becoming homosexual and shame about feeling responsible for the abuse (Hunter, 2011). In conducting a gender analysis of disclosure Alaggia (2005), found similar results in respect of a male fear of being labelled or becoming homosexual following and experience of childhood sexual abuse; 'the experience of being abused by a same-sex perpetrator strongly shaped the men's experiences about their sexual orientation (were they gay or not?) and factored into reasons for not telling' (Alaggia, 2005, p461). Munzer et al, (2016) found similar reasons for non-disclosure in childhood including 'feelings of shame, threats by the perpetrators, and the intention to not burden loved ones (2016, p366).

Themes Relating to Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse		
Not telling as a child	Telling as a child	Telling as an adult
Fear as a barrier to disclosure, especially for girls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of being punished</li> <li>• Fear of the consequences for the family</li> <li>• Fear of not being believed</li> </ul>	Acting out as adolescents Negative consequences of telling as a child <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing changing despite telling</li> <li>• Not being believed</li> <li>• Being asked to choose</li> <li>• Repressing memories</li> <li>• Anger at betrayal, possibly fuelling later disclosures</li> </ul>	Purposeful disclosure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telling the police</li> <li>• Confronting the family</li> </ul> Selective disclosure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only told researcher</li> </ul>
Shame as a barrier to disclosure, especially for boys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shame about hidden homosexuality</li> <li>• Shame of becoming homosexual</li> <li>• Stigma of being labelled as homosexual</li> <li>• Shame and feeling responsible</li> </ul>		
Self-blame as a barrier to disclosure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-blame increasing over time</li> </ul>		

Figure 9: Hunter's (2011) Themes Relating to Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse

Hunter (2010) conducted a qualitative study with individuals who had 'early childhood sexual experiences' to examine the developing discourses and narratives surrounding such individual and their identities. She highlighted the following as facilitators and barrier to disclosure of abuse; social context; respect for authority; rigid gender roles; taboo; lack of a supportive adult; lack of language (as in ability to discuss the topic) and changes in narratives over time which lead to an environment more conducive to speaking about sexual abuse. Hunter established four narrative typologies from her research, each of them explaining a relationship with disclosure. The first of these is a the 'narrative of silence' where by the individual chooses to remain silent about their experiences as a coping strategy allowing them to lead their lives. The second typology was the 'narrative of on-going suffering'. This also related to silence but in this instance the individuals identified here were 'silenced' as opposed to choosing to remain silent. Hunter relates this to the category of

‘victimhood’ while relating the third typology to ‘survivorhood’, the ‘narrative of transformation’. This narrative was identified only by women in Hunter’s sample and she interrogates this as being potentially due to an acceptance that because ‘it was more socially acceptable for a woman to be a victim than a man, it was easier for these women to talk about their experiences publicly and to mobilise social support’ (2010, p183). The term ‘transformation’ was used to denote a ‘choosing’ on the part of these women to be viewed or identified as protectors or helpers. The final typology, as identified by Hunter (2010) was that of the ‘narrative of transcendence’. Hunter related this to those who ‘were reluctant to adopt the identity as a victim or a survivor’ (p184) and who ‘defiantly rejected being stereotyped’ in this regard (ibid).

### *Ecological perspective*

The literature has shown that disclosure is a deeply personal but also an interrelation and socio-cultural phenomenon (Alaggia, 2010; Hunter, 2011; Easton, 2013, Tener and Murphy, 2015). It has many facets and consequences depending on gender, reaction from recipient, severity of abuse and cultural and family dynamics. We can see that such factors play out across the adult’s personal and wider social spheres (Alaggia, 2010; Collin Vézina et al, 2015) and across the life course (Hunter, 2011; Sarsoli et al, 2008; Alaggia et al 2017). In their recent review of the literature regarding facilitators and barriers to disclosure, Alaggia, Collin-Vézina and Lateef (2017) note that ‘knowledge on CSA disclosure has been steadily advancing towards a holistic understanding of the complex interplay of individual, familial, contextual and cultural factors’ (2017, p18). Two key research papers which seek to map facilitators and barriers to disclosure use an ecological perspective to examine these features. The wider use of ecological framework theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as utilised in this research will be discussed in detail in chapter four concerning the theoretical framework of this study. But for now, it is useful to

highlight these two research studies as examples of charting the disclosure process as an ecological phenomenon.

The first of these ‘mapping exercises’ was conducted by Ramona Alaggia, University of Toronto (2010). Alaggia conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with a sample of 40 adults affected by childhood sexual abuse. While seeking both facilitators and barriers, Alaggia notes that barriers were the prominent experience amongst the adults interviewed. She initially highlights the factors that impact upon disclosure in childhood, noting how these coincided with various layers of Bronfenbrenner and Belsky’s ecological framework theory. She charts individual, family, neighbourhood and cultural obstacles to disclosure in childhood including issues such as developmental comprehension of what was occurring during abuse, presence of other forms of abuse in the home, being ostracised by neighbours and representations of the sexualisation of young girls in the media (2010, pp 34-36). Alaggia goes on to comment how this system of charting could ‘also be extended to disclosure of CSA for a fuller understanding of child victims’ (2010, p36) and uses the ontogenic, micro, exo and macro systems of the ecological model to chart barriers to disclosure as experienced by her adult participants. While the majority have been mentioned previously in this chapter, Alaggia notes that ‘disclosure of child sexual abuse is multiply determined by factors related to child characteristics and history, family dynamics, community context, and larger cultural and societal attitudes (2010, p36). She concludes with what is a very pertinent learning in the context of the author’s research:

Practitioners can expect to work with children, adolescents and adults who have attempted to tell over time in different ways, having experienced a wide range of responses. Thus, it is important for professionals to inquire about reasons for withholding, all attempts to tell, responses following disclosure, and consequences of telling. Information should be gathered about family and

other intimate relationships since certain family characteristics increase risk for lack of disclosure.

(Alaggia, 2010, p38)

The second example of a study that utilised an ecological perspective to examine facilitators and barriers to disclosure of childhood sexual abuse was also conducted in Canada, by a team of researchers at McGill University in Montreal. Using Alaggia's study as a guide, Collin-Vézina et al (2015) sought to map the individual, relational and social barriers to disclosure. The study was conducted using a Long Interview Method (McCracken, 1988) with a sample of 67 male and female adults who had experienced childhood sexual abuse. Of interest, they noted that 'of the 67 participants, half (n = 34; 50.7%) did not disclose their CSA experiences before the age of 19 (2015, p128). Instead of using the standard Bronfenbrenner model of the ecological system, Collin-Vézina et al mapped their participants' experiences of barriers in terms of 'barriers from within', 'barriers in relation to others' and 'barriers in relation to the social world' and remind us to that 'it is pertinent to keep in mind the inextricability of the individual and relational barriers from their social context' (2015, p128) (See Figure 9 below).

Barriers from within include 'internalising victim blaming', 'mechanisms to protect oneself' which included factors such as minimising the abuse, convincing oneself that they could deal with the abuse or repressing it altogether; the final barrier from within was 'immature development at time of the abuse'. Barriers in relation to others included 'violence and dysfunction within the family', 'power dynamics' which included manipulation, grooming or threats; the third barrier in relation to others was the awareness of the impact of telling which included the reaction from others and fear regarding this as mentioned previously; the final barrier in this section was that feature of a having a 'fragile social network'. Finally, barriers in relation to the social world included concepts of 'labelling' involving stigma and victimhood; 'taboo of sexuality'; 'lack of services' and 'culture and time' which encapsulates the

invisibility of child sexual abuse throughout time (Collin Vézina et al, 2015, pp128-131).

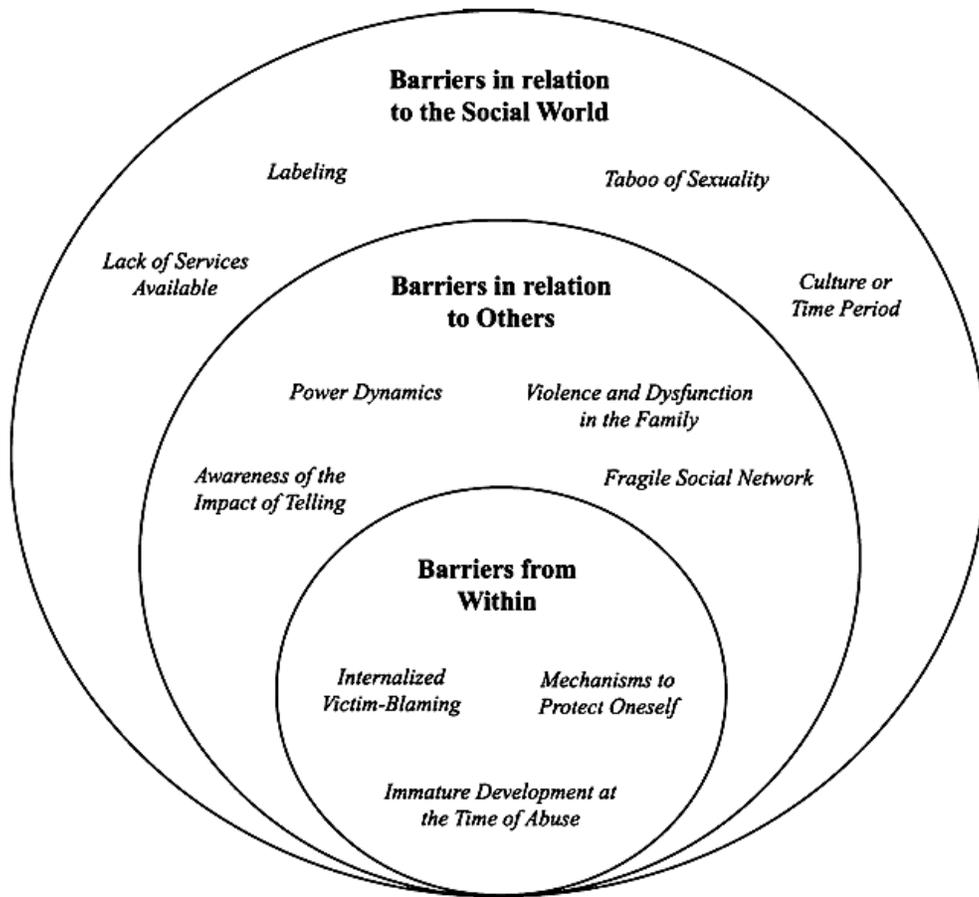


Figure 10: Collin-Vézina, De La Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer and Milne (2015): A Conceptualization of the barriers to CSA disclosure across three levels

They conclude by highlighting the relevance of using a broad ecological approach to examine disclosure of abuse and recommending that ‘future research should pursue two main objectives: to better understand the lived experiences of victims with institutional responses such as child protection services and police following disclosures, and to document not only the negative, potentially harmful outcomes that resulted from disclosures, but the potentially positive outcomes of disclosures’ (2015, p132). It is this call that this research seeks to answer and address and the use of the ecological model in this research will be more fully considered in chapter four.

## Interaction with Services

The Author's research study focuses on the point at which adults disclose to child protection social work services. It has been established in the preceding sections of this chapter that child sexual abuse and disclosure can generate multiple effects and consequences for those who experience it. We know that prevalence is high but that there also exists a 'tip of the iceberg' phenomenon due to the low levels of disclosure. We see from the literature that most individuals do not disclose until adulthood and that males are less likely to disclose than females, due in large part to gender stereotyping and social norms regarding sexuality (Hooper and Warwick, 2006). In terms of interaction with services, MacMillan et al (2003) found that only 8.7% of their sample (n=8991) of those with a history of CSA had been engaged with child protection services during their childhood and this population may be further hidden due to other professionals not enquiring about or engaging with the possibility of a history of childhood sexual abuse (Holmes, Offen and Waller, 1997; Lab, Feigenbaum and De Silva, 2000). Draucker and Martsolf (2008) note that 'some survivors state that reporting the abuse to professionals might result in feeling that the listener does not want to hear their story, especially if the survivor suffered from mental illness or substance abuse' (2008, p1042). Given this 'multi-layered diverse experience', relevant professionals need to be 'aware of the context of each adult survivor when he or she faces the dilemma to tell the story' (Tener and Murphy, 2015, p398). Disclosing can be beneficial however new barriers and facilitators may arise in adulthood (Tener and Murphy, 2015, p398). 'If met with a helpful response, disclosure of sexual abuse can promote health and recovery for survivors by reducing problems associated with shame, self-blame, isolation, and the burden of maintaining a secret' (Easton, 2014, p244). Tener and Murphy outline some of the layers of influence and considerations that impact upon an adult's ability or decision to disclose:

Disclosing should be carefully considered  
depending on domains such as the client's current

emotional state, experiences of former disclosure (if they exist), potential sources for social support, possible perceived responses to the disclosure, and the way those things may affect the survivors' life

(Tener and Murphy, 2015, 398).

There is sparse literature in respect of adults' interactions with social work services regarding an experience of childhood sexual abuse. However, some research has been conducted in respect of interactions with services in a wider sense that may help us understand what this experience may be like. An experience of childhood sexual abuse can 'have a negative effect on interpersonal relations because it occurs in the context of an interpersonal relationship' (Whiffen and MacIntosh, 2005, p27). Gagnier et al (2017) noted that in respect of professionals interacting with those affected by childhood sexual abuse 'showing understanding and openness was found to contribute greatly to building a trusting relationship' (2017, p136). While also being aware that 'in any service context there are risks of re-traumatization if services or professionals, wittingly or unwittingly, replicate the dynamics of abuse, for example by reinforcing stigma and powerlessness (see Hooper and Koprowska, 2000)' (Hooper and Warwick, 2006, p471). Gagnier et al (2017) highlight delay in receiving services as one such risk. While in the context of discussing male versus female service provision they noted that 'participants perceived long waiting lists for services as contributing to the creation of an atmosphere in which the needs of male survivors were deemed less important' (2017, p136). They advised remaining in contact with such clients to reassure them and provide crisis services in the interim where necessary. Dale (1999) advised that such contact could be gender-mediated on the part of the adult with preferences for one gender of staff over another. Hooper and Warwick (2006) also note that 'since child sexual abuse involves the overriding of the child's needs and preferences, the respecting or dismissing of such preferences is itself one location in which a reparative or retraumatizing experience may occur' (p473).

Significant in terms of professionals' abilities to manage such risks of re-traumatisation, Lab et al (2000) found that two thirds of mental health professionals that they surveyed (nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, n=111) felt that they did not have sufficient training to ask their clients about possible histories of sexual abuse in childhood. This finding was echoed in a small, non-generalisable (n=4) child protection social work sample in Ireland (Mooney, 2014). Lab et al also noted that the responses to some of their surveys highlighted that 'some professionals are not fully aware of the correlations between sexual abuse and mental health' (2000, p402) leading potentially to 'a distinct possibility that someone who is untrained in the specific issues of male sexual abuse could inflict psychological damage on these patients' (2000, p403).

While Lab et al (2000) were focussing on professionals' lack of competency or awareness to ask about childhood sexual abuse Agar et al (2002) focused on the 'equally important issue of what happens after clients disclose abuse' (2002, p71). Agar et al's study recommended a need to ask clients about their abuse histories, refer them to other services where necessary and, importantly, ask about their histories of disclosure (2002). They suggest that 'there is a huge difference between a disclosure of child abuse that was disclosed near the time of the abuse resulting in support, and a disclosure of child abuse that has been kept entirely secret for 20 or 30 years' (Agar et al, 2002, p75). This links with the potential effects relating to repression of memory, stigma and shame as discussed above (MacIntosh, Fletcher and Collin-Vézina, 2016). Agar also found a complete absence of reporting disclosures of a history of abuse on to legal authorities. This was explained by the lack of a legal obligation to do so in New Zealand. They argue that such a protocol should not be mandated but something which is discussed with each client (2002).

Ultimately, Agar et al recommend training should be offered 'covering when and how to ask about abuse, how to respond to disclosures, provision of therapy for abuse, and issues relating to reporting alleged crimes to the authorities' and

that such training should ‘focus not only on developing skills but also on building a sound knowledge base about the effects of abuse’ (Agar et al, 2002, p77). Similar training and guidelines were also deemed appropriate in respect of health professional’s interactions with adult survivors (McGregor, Julich, Glover and Gautam, 2010; Havig, 2008). Agar et al, acknowledge the issue of potential vicarious trauma stating that while ‘listening, and responding thoroughly, to abuse histories can be a very upsetting experience for clinicians. Such vicarious traumatization is not an excuse, however, for not doing one’s job’ (Agar et al, 2002, p77).

While finding generally supportive reactions to adult males with histories of sexual abuse, Richey-Suttles and Remer (1997) found that psychologists with more traditional views tended to blame victims, view experiences less as sexual abuse where victims presented passive response to the abuse and ultimately urged psychologists to accept ‘where the victim is in regard to his attitude about abuse’ (Richey-Suttles and Remer, 1997, p57).

It is important to note that due to the life-long process of disclosure (Hunter, 2011) and the long-lasting effects of abuse there are also learnings to be gained from the literature dealing solely with disclosure in childhood. However, due to the focus of this study on adult-social worker interaction regarding abuse in childhood, it is not proposed that this literature be examined as part of this study. However, it is prudent to note some key points that may lend context. Overall, the literature relating to children’s experiences of disclosure highlights the need for more supportive comments during the disclosure process (Lewy, Cyr and Dion, 2015), more sensitive responses to disclosure (Williams, Nelson-Gardell, Coulborn-Faller, Tishelman and Cordisco-Steele, 2014), the need to actively engage families, where appropriate, to facilitate a supportive environment (DePanfilis and Zuravin, 2002) and also highlighting that some children experience the process of disclosure, to child protection services in particular, as ‘intensely challenging with active pressure and threats from relatives and feelings of fear, guilt and ambivalence’ (Linell, 2017, p11). While

not specifically focussed on the adult-child protection social worker interaction or within the, somewhat unique, Irish policy or practice setting there are applicable learnings here for social work practice in terms of how professionals should interact, what should be borne in mind and a need to be aware of a history of abuse, its effects and the complexities and histories of disclosure that may be present.

### Gap in Social Work Knowledge

While we can glean some learning from studies regarding the interpersonal effects of abuse and those concerning interaction with other services there is a dearth of information in respect of adults' experiences of engaging with child protection social work services. It must be noted that this is partly attributable to the fact that Ireland's policy and legal structure is somewhat unique internationally whereby adults are directed to engage with child protection social work services in respect of their experiences of childhood abuse (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011). This explains the lack of international literature but the issue of adult disclosure to social work services in Ireland has also suffered from a lack of national literature. The only research focussing on this issue is that of Mooney (2014) which was a small scale qualitative study examining what it is like for social workers to receive adult disclosures. Like the studies discussed above (Agar et al, 2002, McGregor et al, 2010 and Havig, 2008) Mooney found that child protection social workers in Ireland experience a lack of training in respect of receiving disclosures of childhood sexual abuse from adults. Mooney noted specific findings in respect a 'level of personal sensitivity but professional helplessness' (2014, p10) regarding the receiving of disclosures from adults. The social workers interviewed echoed findings relating to a lack of training, direction from management and a lack of resources to effectively manage and assess such disclosures and thereby offer an efficient and sensitive service to those adults

effected by childhood sexual abuse. Of note however, is that all of those interviewed noted that they felt child protection social work was still best placed to receive and assess such referrals and that with proper training and guidance they expressed a 'willingness to fulfil the role' (2014, p13).

## Summary

This research explores what it is like for adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood to interact with social work services. This chapter sought to provide an overview of the various facets of this issue. Discussing the latest research regarding the prevalence of child sexual abuse including the key feature that such prevalence knowledge is based upon disclosure. The chapter has defined what disclosure is and the issues that impact upon an individual's experience of disclosure including key research which supports the premise that most individuals who experience sexual abuse in childhood do not disclose until adulthood, if at all. This is followed by an examination of initial and long-term effects of an experience of abuse and how these effects can be echoed in the disclosure process. The chapter also demonstrates how these effects can impact upon an adult's interaction with professional services, the significance of responses to disclosures and the specific gap in knowledge in social work in this area, specifically in Ireland.

We see that disclosure is an individual, inter-relational and life-long process. Disclosing is not only 'a matter of courage' (Collin-Vézina, De La Sablonnière-Griffin, Palmer, Milne, 2015, p132) but is a process of traversing multiple barriers and facilitators across the many domains of an individual's socio-ecological environment; incorporating family dynamics, issues regarding power, belief, shame and stigma and interactions with professional services. Ulman et al (2010) highlight that 'understanding the circumstances in which disclosure is beneficial and those in which it is harmful is important for facilitating the creation of a more supportive environment for trauma disclosure' (2010, p130). Collin-Vézina et al (2015) ultimately suggest that:

To expand our understanding of the complex, multi-determined impact of disclosing for CSA victims, future research should pursue two main objectives: to better understand the lived experiences of victims with institutional responses such as child protection services and

police following disclosures, and to document not only the negative, potentially harmful outcomes that resulted from disclosures, but the potentially positive outcomes of disclosures.

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework developed to assist in designing, researching and analysing that data collected to explore adults' experiences of disclosure to child protection social work services in Ireland.

# Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the various theories utilised within this research that best explain and assist in understanding the phenomena being researched. The chapter initially sets out the author’s ontological and epistemological stance followed by a brief overview of the key theories being utilised. These theories will be explored further in the Discussion chapter in respect of the data collected as part of this research and the relevant literature. This chapter seeks to introduce them, highlight their basic principles and why they are relevant to this research. The chapter then details the construction of a theoretical framework which seeks to incorporate these theories in a manner which highlights the similar trajectories of abuse and disclosure over the life-course (see below).

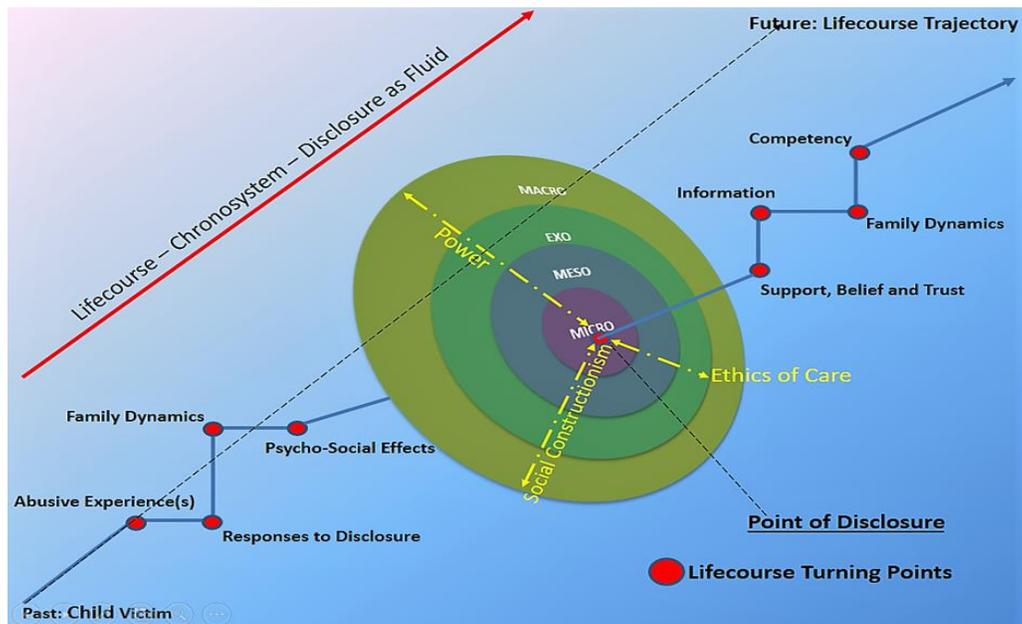


Figure 11: Proposed theoretical framework of adult disclosures

## Ontology and Epistemology

*Picking a problem that fits a method, a commonplace activity, is no guarantee that the problem is worth considering at all*

(Brewer, 1999, p330).

‘Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what there is to know about the world’ (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape, 2014, p4). Social science has been largely shaped by two main ontological perspectives; realism and idealism. Realism suggests that there is an external reality which exists independently of the meanings and interpretations attached to it by those individuals experiencing it. Idealism, takes the view that reality is fundamentally socially constructed and is only ‘knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings’ (ibid, p5). Epistemology on the other hand is ‘...the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion’ (Oxford University Press, 2014). Epistemology concerns how we know, how we can say something is true and how we justify this ‘truth’. While there are many perspectives the following section outlines the approach specific to this research.

Traditional positivist demands of rigour, validity and replication can and have the effect of casting qualitative research into the category of woolly, subjective or anecdotal research. The author therefore explored the exposure of the literature, the self and the socio-political contexts as a means of validating the question being asked and selecting a methodology to assist in the interpretation of the data generated as opposed to one which would dictate that process. This ultimately led to the development of a situation whereby the author’s epistemological stance began to define the methodology being chosen. Koch and Harrington (1998) explain that we, as researchers, bring several elements to

our research; some obvious, some not so. They contend that researchers bring ‘data generated, a range of literature, a positioning of this literature, a positioning of oneself and moral socio-political contexts’ (1998, p882). It was therefore crucial that a project, especially one which defines itself in terms of its epistemological approach as opposed to its ultimate methodology, clearly exposes the element of ‘self’ within each stage of the research. This may be seen a relentless exposure of the subjective in pursuit of objectivity; a nervous hangover from the dominance of positivist research. However, it is the author’s belief that validity and rigour can be achieved by an admission and inclusion of ‘the self’ within the research. The following is an exposition of the theories utilised in this research and why they were deemed relevant.

## Overview of Theories

### *Social Constructionism*

This thesis is based upon a social constructionist epistemological stance; assuming that ‘knowledge’ is derived from ‘knowledge communities’. ‘Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities-or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities-that define or "constitute" the communities that generate them’ (Bruffee, 1986, p774). Kenneth Gergen, one of the key figures in Social Constructionism, puts it more simply and usefully by describing social constructionist inquiry as the ‘process by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live’ (Gergen, 1985, p266). In referencing a mounting criticism of positivist-empiricism, Gergen asks ‘how can words map reality when major constraints over word usage are furnished by linguistic context?’ (Gergen, 1985, p267). In the context of this research, how can we

discuss and respond to the phenomenon of child sexual abuse if we don't define it? We see an example of this posed by O'Sullivan (2002) where he refers to Sr. Stanislaus' reaction to allegations that she was aware of sexual abuse of children in one of Ireland's industrial schools in the 1970s, to which she responded, "the term 'sexual abuse' had not, as far as I know, even been coined" (2002, p197). 'Constructionism asks one to suspend belief that commonly accepted categories receive their warrant through observation' (1985, p267). Using a social constructionist viewpoint within this thesis helps us to understand how dominant discourses through history have shaped the form of our policies and practices in the field of child protection. It can also assist in explaining how such discourses and societal beliefs can play a part in an individual's relationship with disclosure and the possible origins of the reactions they may receive. By way of context, this thesis has explained how our knowledge of child sexual abuse has been shaped and mediated by the dominate discourses (historical, cultural, political) at particular times in history. It has also been discussed how child protection policy in Ireland only began to incorporate child sexual abuse in the 1980s reflecting a re-emergence of our awareness of the issue. It is important to also acknowledge that the notion of child protection and the concept of a child protection system and institutionalised, or State, responses to abuse and child welfare are also forms of social construction. The Irish child protection system is situated in a westernised environment where fundamental human and children's rights are recognised and routinely tested through various legal and governmental mechanisms. It must also be acknowledged that such rights are derived from a predominantly western ethos. Children's rights and child protection can look vastly different in other parts of the world dependant on the local and regional social norms and values. While important to acknowledge that child protection and what constitutes abuse can be socially constructed in different ways this research does not seek to cover all variations. The approach adopted here is to acknowledge this social constructed nature and to define, using the available historical, political and legal evidence and scholarship, what these concepts

mean in the context of this research. This research therefore is grounded in a rights-based approach taking the view that all individuals should not only be cognisant of their rights as such but also be empowered to participate in the issues that affect their lives. The author also adopts a distinctive socio-legal gaze in respect of interrogating the central research question. This, also grounded in the above rights-based approach, is adopted due to the interplay of issues regarding power of State and legal authority, individual voice and influence of the socio-ecological setting in which an adult effected by abuse finds themselves at a given time. Ultimately, a social constructionist epistemological stance requires reflexive inquiry; in respect of ‘our conditions, our traditions, institutions, and relationships’ (Gergen, 1999, p115).

### *Power*

Meaning and language are matters of negotiation (Parton, 2003) and Foucault suggests that power is resultant in such negotiation and interactions. Power is a prominent topic in sociological, philosophical, political and cultural debate and one of the most difficult to encapsulate (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009). It is a concept that has been conceptualised in many ways (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009; Mooney and McGregor, 2017) and is a central component in the analysis of childhood sexual abuse (see Kennan, 2012; Hanisch and Moulding, 2011; Death, 2013; Bell, 2011; Hagan and Smail, 1997). While power mediates many experiences across the life course of an adult who has experienced childhood sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1986), the focus of this research is on the experiences of adults who disclose to child protection social work services. Therefore, the theorisation and use of power will be, in the main, confined to this environment.

Power has been theorised in many ways. Stanley Cohen (1985) examined degrees of power; power being held in different amounts and at different levels dependant on position and authority. Tew (2006) speaks specifically of power

within social work practice and discusses this in respect of power and powerlessness and the importance of knowing how individuals come to experience these. Bell (2011) has examined power in the context of child sexual abuse using a specific Foucauldian approach while the Irvine, Epstein and Chambon (1999) have grounded Foucault's theorisation of power, power being resultant from relationships, in the context of social work practice.

Mark Haugaard and Stephen Clegg, editors of the Sage handbook of Power (2013) encourage us to consider the different theories of power as one would a family where there are different characters and emphases. In considering this *'family'*, they offer the following helpful frames to work with: 'power over', where A gets B to do something that B would not otherwise do and; 'power to', a joint capacity for action between A and B. Allen (1998) and latterly Pansardi (2012) argue that these are not different types of power, but different 'analytically distinguishable aspects' (2012, p73). McGregor (2016), in summarising the various theorisations of power applied in the field of social work provides the following distillation:

'Power is multi-directional and non-linear, power is everywhere and somewhere in differing, degrees; power is not in itself either good or bad –power exists and can be used to either effect; where power exists, resistance will also be found – 'le resistance'. Power needs to be understood from a range of dimensions in terms of process; products, relations'

(McGregor, 2016, p13)

The conceptualisation of power in this research draws upon many sources, but primarily the work of Michel Foucault whose earlier theorisations of power framed it in terms of being ubiquitous and being resultant from relationships. In terms of the focus of this research and in line with Satka and Skehill's (2011) assessment, Foucault is particularly useful in making 'visible the micro point of view of how the mechanisms of power and governing are working in time and

place or in particular spaces' (2011, p193). While acknowledging the multiple other perspectives on Power, it is this 'inter-relational' nature of power, also supported by Haugaard and Ryan, 2012, that compliments this research, as it examines an inter-relational phenomenon (disclosure of child sexual abuse), in an inter-relational setting (engagement with social work services).

Child sexual abuse was originally placed on the political and policy agenda by second-wave feminists campaigning in the 1960s and 1970s (Hanisch and Moulding, 2011; Keenan, 2013). Hanisch and Moulding (2011) note that feminists were also the main drivers of recognising child sexual abuse 'as a social and political problem, rather than a personal experience confined to a few unfortunate individuals' (2011, p278). Keenan (2012) writing on the issue of clerical abuse, however suggests that the initial, or second-wave feminist conceptualisation of child sexual abuse tended to emphasise 'power and control, the role of patriarchy, and the gendered context in which the problem comes to be' (2012, p115). Keenan goes on to suggest that this notion of power 'rests on the paradigm of power as domination based on force, which conceptualises power as a possession and power as something that all men have' (2012, p116) and neglects other conceptualisations of power such as 'power as relational', power as complex and shifting' and 'power experienced as a result of autonomy' (Keenan, 2012, pp116-117).

Azzopardi et al (2017) note that 'while the etiology of CSA is considered external to the child, power-based causative agents originating in upper-level [ecological] systems can manifest at the level of the individual' (2017, p11). Compatible with the ecological and inter-relational analysis of power in this research, Haugaard and Clegg (2013) writing as editors of the Sage Handbook of Power, encourage a holistic view of power and power conceptualisations recommending that they be viewed as a family of conceptualisations encompassing frames such as: Power over and power to; External and Internal Power; Potential and Actual Power; and Good and Bad/ Positive –Negative

power (See also McGregor, 2016; Mooney and McGregor, 2017, ISPCAN conference paper).

### *Foucault and Power*

Foucault wrote in excruciating detail across a startling range of topics including institutionalisation and medicine (*Birth of the Clinic, 1973*), psychiatry (*Madness and Civilisation, 1965*), penal institutions (*Discipline and Punish, 1977*) and human sciences (*The Order of Things, 1970*), to name but a few. His work is referred to in his obituary as “the most important event of thought in our century” (Merquior, 1985, p11). Despite his detailed studies, he did not view his work as definitive and frequently reviewed and countered his own arguments and standpoints as his work developed. He therefore presented his work as a ‘toolbox’ from which one could draw useful and applicable tools to explain and articulate concepts and perspectives:

All my books ... are little tool boxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screw-driver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ... so much the better.

(Foucault 1975, *Interview with Roger Pol Droit*,  
cited in Paton 1979, p. 115)

Satka and Skehill (2011) note that for Foucault, ‘power must be understood beyond its negative effects ‘power produces, it produces reality, it produces domains of truth and rituals of truth’ (Foucault, 1977: 194)’ (2011, p199-200). One of the sources upon which this thesis draws is Foucault’s trilogy on the ‘History of Sexuality’ and specifically his development of thought regarding the concept of ‘the confessional’, regarding the theorisation of sexuality. In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault initially speaks about

power in terms of the repression of sexuality, but ultimately disagrees with a power formulated as solely oppressive or negative; 'it is a power that only has the force of negative on its side...in no position to produce... it is basically anti-energy' (1976, p85). Being one to examine power in the specific (political power, sexuality, insanity etc.) Foucault examines power in the form of monarchic power of the middle ages. He states that in 'Western societies since the Middle Ages, the exercise of power has always been formulated in terms of law' (1976, p87) but that in modern times this has transferred, or can be similarly analysed 'in a collective being and no longer a sovereign individual' (p89). In other words, a State or government, or Agency. Foucault also moves away from the tradition connection with law and power due to the concept of power gradually being 'penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power that are probably irreducible to the representation of law', 'that go beyond the State and its apparatus' (p89). He goes so far as to state that up until this point in his writings he 'accepted the traditional conception of power as an essentially judicial mechanism, which lays down the law, which prohibits, which refuses, and which has a whole range of negative effects...Now I believe that conception to be inadequate' (Gordon (Ed), 1980, p183).

Therefore, Foucault departs at this point in the text to set about theorising a new concept of power. To Foucault power is not, 'a group of institutions... that ensure the *subservience* of the citizens'; not a 'mode of *subjugation* which...has the form of rule'; and not a 'general system of *domination* exerted by one group over another' (p92 emphasis added). Therefore, very much not an oppressive or negative conceptualisation; power is not used pejoratively. He suggests that 'power must be understood in the first instance as a multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation' (p92). By this Foucault is saying that power is not located in a fixed point but is a moving entity which is ultimately unstable and exists locally or 'imminent in the sphere' as quoted above. This 'imminent' theorisation of power suggests that power is ubiquitous, not omnipotent, but is produced in every relation. Therefore, as Foucault suggests, 'power is

everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (p93). It could be argued that another way of interpreting this is that existence is the meaning and experience of interrelations and, as power is imminent within relationships, this lends it a ubiquitous nature.

Foucault makes a number of propositions in respect of his theorisation of power: 'power is exercised from innumerable points', 'are imminent to relationships', 'relations of power...have a directly productive role', 'power comes from below' 'power relations are both intentional and non-subjective', 'there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives', 'where there is power there is resistance', 'points of resistance are present everywhere...there is no single locus of great refusal' (1976, pp 94-97; see also Chambon, Irving and Epstein, 1999). Foucault clarifies these propositions further in his text. For example, he continues the non-oppressive formulation of power where he suggests that power comes from below. By this he means that it is not a binary relationship of opposition, one against another, it is not negative or positive but is defined within the relationship specific to that relationship but, its imminent definition is also influenced by what Foucault terms a 'series of aims and objectives'. These are not attributable to those forms or individuals party to the relations of power, not 'as a result of choice or decision' but are 'implicit characteristics of the great anonymous'. This echoes the social constructionist epistemology assumed in this thesis. While relations of power are fluid and imminent they are influenced by a certain 'objectives' laid down or created elsewhere. It is only through an 'archaeological' assessment of the issue (namely childhood sexual abuse in this instance) that one can uncover such 'aims and objectives' and examine their influence in the present. Foucault might term such an exercise a venture in uncovering the 'history of the present'. What emerges therefore, is a non-oppressive, inter-rational, fluid and ubiquitous, but imminent, form of power influenced by our socially constructed reality and it is this formulation of power which this thesis adopts to further its exploration of adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to social work services.

The 'toolbox' nature of utilising the work of Foucault becomes pertinent when one examines his later work in respect of power. Foucault in his paper '*The Subject and Power*' (1982) argues that 'in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations' (1982, p780). He does this by setting out a 'series of oppositions' 'opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live' (1982, p780). Foucault's language in this later work has changed from his earlier discussion of power as laid out above. He speaks of power in terms of oppression; 'power over', 'struggles against'. He speaks of people criticising local power, looking for the 'immediate enemy' and not the 'chief enemy'. Ultimately, he talks about power as something which subjugates and makes subject to (p781). Foucault also uses the term power differently, his earlier theorisation making statements such as 'power is...' while his later theorisation speaking about forms of power; legal power, pastoral power, royal power. In this vein, he also relates such a theorisation to the development of a new 'political form of power' that developed in the sixteenth century, namely 'the State'. While his earlier theorisation also starts at this point of development of power he moves beyond this to suggest that power transcended this theorisation and is no longer theorised in terms of the State or the monarchy and exists in forms that are no longer reducible to law.

This 'new' oppressive 'form' of power is a divergence from Foucault's earlier theorisation which saw power as imminent and its use and effect followed from this. Foucault's latter theorisation sees power in different forms being exerted over 'free' subjects to 'modify, consume or destroy' (p786). He goes so far as to warn; 'for let us not deceive ourselves; if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others (1982, p786). While this may be viewed as a different theorisation of power than his earlier work, Foucault still discusses power in terms of relationships, albeit this is now in the context of three over

lapping and reciprocal relationships of power, communication and objective capacities (p787) and advises ultimately that defined institutions can be analysed by focusing on power relations.

Selecting from this 'toolbox', power is conceived as not positive or negative, but something that can have positive or negative effects. As per Amy Allen's theorisation of power, which compliments this research, these need not be intentional decisions, as power can be unintentionally exerted (Allen, 1998). Allen ultimately discusses this in terms of *power over* others but suggests this may not be intentional (1998, p33). It is argued that an understanding of the 'mechanisms of power' (Foucault) present in the experience of abuse must be examined; shame, secrecy, othering, isolation, infantilization. This includes Amy Allen's concepts of constraint of choice and 'power over' as well as a need for social workers to examine their own power (Smith, 2013).

### *Ethics of Care*

The feminist theory of Ethics of Care is of relatively recent origin and has moved in recent times from its origins within the private realm of family life to encompass professional interactions in medicine, law and nursing, to name but a few (Klaver, van Elst and Baart, 2014). 'The shared assumptions of the ethics of care are a set of interwoven arguments about the nature of the good in human interactions (Meagher and Parton, 2004, p15). Meagher and Parton go on to outline these arguments or core assumptions the first of which is the 'interdependence of humans' or relational ontology (Sevenhuijsen, 2001); the second is the equal worth of all people and; the third is the placement of caring as a moral posture, responding to each person as unique (Meagher and Parton, 2004, p15). In presenting three types of ethics of care, Edwards (2009) highlights Gilligan's (1982) original dichotomy between ethics of justice and ethics of care. Whereby ethics of justice approaches moral problems in the

same way as other types of problems with ‘cool, impartial deliberation’ being employed to abstract moral principles (2009, p232). While ethics of care:

‘focuses ‘further in’ on the problem as opposed to ‘abstracting out’ relevant moral principles. Thus, one considers contextual factors such as the nature of the relationships between those involved in the problem. One seeks to preserve these relationships and to engage with their emotional registers.

(Edwards, 2009, p232)

Ethics of Care also hypothesises a devaluing of care-work as a social good. It attributes this to a rise in managerialism and a need for problems to fit criteria (Parton, 2003; Lloyd, 2006). Parton notes that ethics of care ‘posits the image of a ‘relational self’” in ‘concrete relationships with others’ (2003, p10) and it therefore compliments this theoretical framework which focusses on the inter-relational aspects of disclosure to a social work service. Parton (2003), specifically referencing the contributions of social constructionism and ethics of care to social work practice, states that ethics of care ‘implies being open to the “other”” highlighting the need for communication, dialogue and interpretation (2003, p11). Citing Sevenhuijsen (1998), Parton notes that the service user is not someone to be known but instead is someone who should be understood and communicated with. It is this ethos with which this thesis, and its objectives, identifies; the understanding of an adult who has experienced childhood abuse. Parton sums up his discussion of ethics of care stating that:

The idea of the professional encounter as a situation of reflective solidarity attempts to take account of the idea that all participants, including the professionals, shift their positions, enlarge their perspectives, value the words and offerings of the others and come to see the world in a slightly different way in order to negotiate and identify solutions.

(Parton, 2003, p13)

This qualitative research works from an assumption that the individual narratives of the adults who have participated in this study are not generalizable. While aspects of their experiences will be similar they are ultimately individual and unique. This is also reinforced in the literature whereby a generalised 'syndrome' of child sexual abuse effects has not been supported (Beitchman et al, 1991, 1992; Oddone et al, 2001). Ethics of care is pertinent to this research in that it supports the uniqueness of individual experience, respects individual voice and ultimately seeks to interrogate interpersonal interactions. It is therefore key to examining the adult/social worker dynamic during a disclosure interview. Howe (1993) argues that service users generally wish their interaction with services to revolve around the ethos of 'accept me, understand me, talk to me'. Parton (2003) examines this in terms of the ethics of care perspective arguing that while social workers bring valuable skills they must foster a relationship of collaboration with service users recognising that such skills are in 'knowing how' as opposed to 'knowing that'.

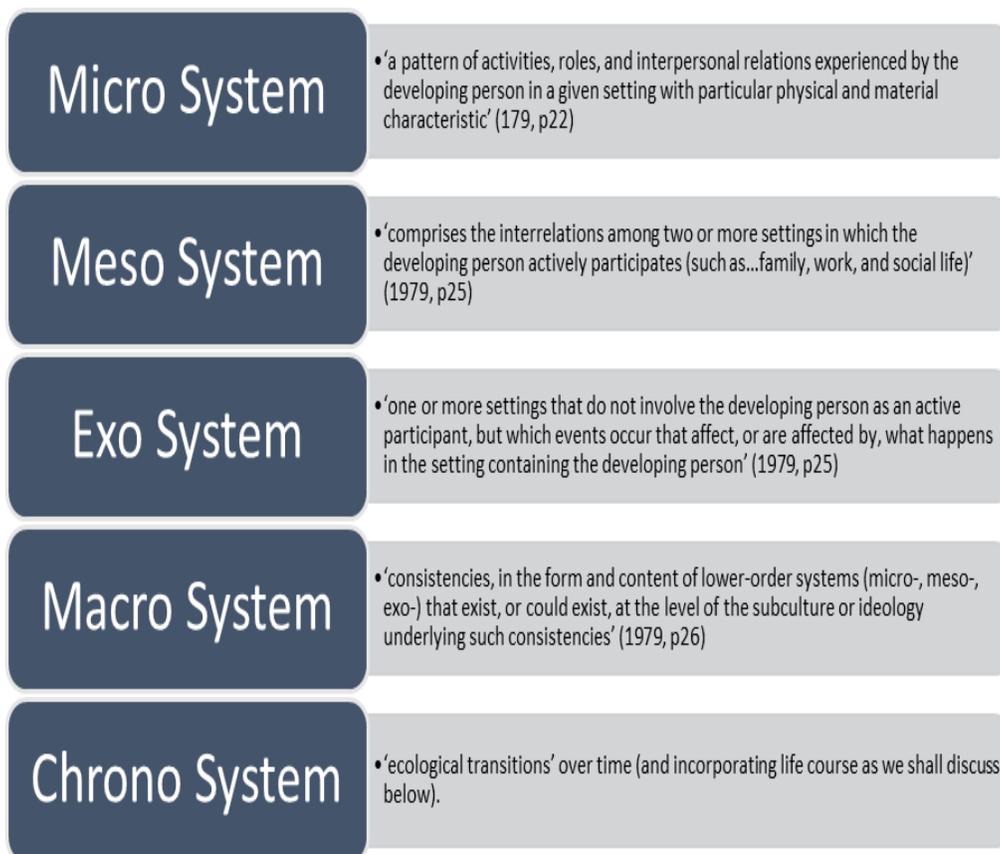
Reminding us of the socially constructed nature of our attitudes and responses to child sexual abuse in Ireland, as discussed earlier, Foucault speaks about 'objectives' laid down elsewhere influencing the fluid and imminent relations of power; stating that through an 'archaeological' assessment one can uncover such 'aims and objectives' and examine their influence in the present. For the purposes of this research it is argued here that such relationships can be further analysed via the ethics of care theory, which examines the relational (social work/adult) while taking account of the individual (adult effected by childhood trauma), including their path or life course to arriving at such a point (Tew, 2006).

In summary, this thesis can be said to concern individual interaction with societal 'knowledge', self-history/life-course trajectory, and service provision. These are all domains which can be further interrogated within

Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology model (1979). While not a theory in and of itself, it is proposed that this model be used as a framework to hold and give context to the above-mentioned theories.

### *Ecological Framework Theory*

The ecological model as developed by developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, was initially designed as a new perspective on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In his seminal text, *'The Ecology of Human Development'* he defines the ecological system as a 'set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls' (1979, p3). Bronfenbrenner outlines the layers of this 'doll' as follows:



*Figure 12: Layers of the Ecological System (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979)*

Bronfenbrenner acknowledges that, at the time of his writing, these were not unfamiliar concepts within psychology or the social sciences; ‘moral activity, dyad, role, setting, social network, institutions, sub-culture, culture’ (1979, p8). What is new, Bronfenbrenner suggests, is the interconnectedness of these systems and phenomena. Similarly, in this thesis and this chapter, while the theories laid out are not novel in terms of their use to examine childhood sexual abuse, what is novel is the exposition of their relatedness. Which, it is argued here via the development of a new framework, is best framed within the ecological model.

One of Bronfenbrenner’s key messages at the outset of his thesis is that how the environment is perceived by the individual is what matters and not necessarily how it is in “objective” reality (1979, p4). This view complements the social constructionist epistemological stance of this thesis in that Bronfenbrenner holds that ‘the aspects of the environment that are most powerful in shaping the course of psychological growth are overwhelmingly those that have meaning to the person in a given situation’ (1979, p22). This ‘phenomenological’ perspective and focus on ‘experience’ is also consistent with the use of BNIM in this study as will be discussed in the methodology chapter. This is key to the author’s thesis in that the focus is on the adults’ experiences of disclosure to child protection services and the various layers of influence and power relationships that impact upon the perception, or lived-experience, of that interaction. Since its development, the ecological framework has been applied as an explanatory frame in multiple settings and disciplines including child maltreatment (Belsky, 1980) and more specifically, as discussed, to disclosure of child sexual abuse (Alaggia, 2010; Collin Vézina et al, 2015).

Tew (2006), who speaks of power in terms of ‘productive modes’ and ‘oppressive modes’ and argues that before embarking on strategies in support of emancipation it is critical to understand how individuals have come to experience powerlessness. It is therefore argued that to assist service users, services must understand how individuals have come to be engaged with social

work. This makes an argument for the understanding of experiences of abuse from an ecological perspective. The research tells us that experiences of abuse are replicated in the experience of disclosure (Alaggia, 2005, Hunter 2011) and therefore such an understanding must include an understanding of disclosure. This requires taking a life-course perspective, which resembles the chronosphere, placing disclosure and abuse on the same trajectory and not viewing them as sequential, but as fluid experiences that play out of the course of a life:

‘If there are two trajectories, one embedded with the other, what is the relation between them? Is the individual simply caught in the current of history, or does he exhibit a momentum of his own? How much lag is there? Does the past leave its mark on the present? And for how long?’

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p265)

To examine this, Bronfenbrenner engages the research of sociologist, Glen Elder. Elder utilised a pre-existing research design and project at his University of California, Berkeley, where a cohort of 11-year-old children had been followed and studied in to mid-life. Elder utilised this sample, then in their mid-forties, to examine a phenomenon common to all, the impact of the Great Depression and to compare their life-course development. Bronfenbrenner deals with the subject of Elder’s work extensively in his text but sums up by saying that:

‘Surely the most spectacular outcome of Elder’s work is his demonstration that the events in one setting exert their influence on a person’s competence and relations with other in quite another setting decades later’

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p284).

This theorisation is critical in terms of the author’s thesis that the effects of abuse in childhood can have influence in quite different settings, decades later;

namely an interaction with social work. Added to this it is argued, and supported by Finkelhor (1985), Spaccarelli (1994) and others, that when the interaction echoes the dynamics of the original incident (re stigma, belief, trust, power) that influence is even stronger. 'Elder demonstrates the temporal elongation of exo- and mesosystem connections. Experiences in one setting carry over into other settings, often over extended periods of time. In Elder's research, the settings that were most important in this regard were family and the peer group, and they are likely to be so in every life course because of their special properties' (1979, p284). This is particularly pertinent in terms of childhood sexual abuse given, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the profile of those who abuse and the setting in which that abuse commonly takes place. However, 'Elder has demonstrated that the effects of processes occurring in one setting may not be observable until the person enters some other setting in later life (1979, p285). Therefore, while effects of abuse may and do exist, they may only present themselves in specific settings years later, this thesis would again argue that a setting that echoes the dynamics of the setting in which such developmental changes were wrought may be more likely to rouse such 'effects'.

Bronfenbrenner, therefore, poses the question 'Under what circumstances are such sleeper effects likely to occur?' We are reminded of our discussion of Beitchman et al (1991, 1992) and their study of both long and short-term effects of abuse where they also refer to 'sleeper effects' 'of which the child and others are unaware (or non-observable in Elder and Bronfenbrenner's parlance) but which emerge with dramatic impact in adulthood' (1992, p102 parentheses added). Beitchman et al pose a cause of such 'sleeper effects' by suggesting that they may arise due to the adult's ability 'to assess childhood events from a different psychological perspective' (p102) or as Elder put it, effects caused in one setting, only observable possibly decades later. Bronfenbrenner suggests that 'to demonstrate that an ecological trajectory has been developed it is necessary to show that it carries over and persists in a new setting' (1979,

p286). Use of Elder's approach allows us to do just that and leads us towards the use of a life-course perspective.

### *Life Course Perspective*

Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Crosnoe (2003) state that 'today, the life course perspective is perhaps the pre-eminent theoretical orientation in the study of lives' (p3). In the Handbook on the Life Course (2003), Elder et al define the life course 'as consisting of age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history' (2003, p4). It is 'best viewed as a theoretical orientation' which 'provides a framework for studying phenomena at the nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change' (2003, p10). While acknowledging that certain terms such as 'life span', 'life history' and 'life cycle' are also utilised Elder et al argue that these are not synonymous with the 'life course'. Life course research 'entails multiple levels, from the macro structures and social institutions of society to the micro experience of individuals, and draws upon both quantitative and qualitative data' (2003, p7). They suggest that the development of life course theory brought about a recognition of the biographical and historical influences on people's lives. The life course approach, or perspective, is therefore appealing to this research in that it compliments not only the theoretical foundations in the form of socially constructed lives, influence of ecological environment and individual effects of both abuse and disclosure but also the biographical narrative interviewing methodology (BNIM) used in this research.

Traditionally, life course research has tended to follow 'life stages' that are marked out over time and study individuals or cohorts in terms of these stages, e.g. marriage, job loss, birth of children etc. However, Elder et al note the limited nature of such approaches in that they fail to take account of the multiple roles people play and multiple settings in which they exist over time (2003). Taking a life course perspective has also been described as an activity

in examining complexities associated with time (Settersten 2003; Hägerstrand 1970). These include lived past-paths already travelled and anticipated future trajectories, both retrospective and prospective. We therefore see that the notion of ‘trajectory’ or life course path is a central principle of the perspective. Elder et al (2003) define life course ‘trajectories’ as follows:

Trajectories, or sequences of roles and experiences, are themselves made up of transitions, or changes in state or role. Examples of transitions include leaving the parental home, becoming a parent, or retiring. The time between transitions is known as a duration. Long durations enhance behavioral stability through acquired obligations and vested interests.

(2003, p8).

As noted, such trajectories can contain ‘transitions’ which are changes in status or identity, both personally and socially’ (p8) and ‘turning points’ which involve a ‘substantial change in the direction of one's life, whether subjective or objective’. Turning points are experiences or events that change an individual’s trajectory. They can be the result of single significant incidents, or ‘ruptures’ (Zittoun et al, 2013), or occur gradually leading to potential trigger moments (Elder, Gimbel and Ivie, 1991; Teruya and Hser, 2010; Pickles and Rutter, 1991). In a review of the literature in this area, Teruya and Hser note that ‘life events and experiences may have cumulative and long-range effects, opening up or shutting down future opportunities’ (2010, p3). Noting the life course orientation’s attention to social, cultural and historical contexts Teruya and Hser point out that whether something acts as a turning point is often dependent on such contextual factors which, they argue, may be unpredictable (2010, p4).

## Summary of Theories

This chapter has explored the various theories being utilised in this study. While acknowledging many different approaches and perspectives and, indeed, many different uses of these theories, this research and this chapter clearly explicates the author's perspective and standpoint. Beginning with a social constructionist epistemology the research, within the preceding context chapter, uses social constructionism to examine and explain the development of dominant discourses in respect of sexual abuse, awareness of sexual abuse, responses to it and how these can ultimately impact upon the individual. Foucault's work on the History of Sexuality, specifically his writings on power and the confessional are used to highlight the effect of such discourses; namely the language used in terms of disclosure, obligations to report and the aforementioned 'taboo' surrounding sexuality in general in Ireland. This language and meaning are ultimately matters of power and inter-relations and, it is argued here, that the concept of power is therefore central to any analysis of childhood sexual abuse with this research adopting Foucault's conceptualisation of power as resultant from relationships as one perspective on this issue. The concept of inter-relationality itself, especially in the context of care or social work settings, is best examined via the body of work discussing ethics of care which supports the uniqueness of individual experience. These inter-relations, socio-historical, cultural, professional, governmental and individual are placed within an ecological framework with the unique lived-experiences of the individual being fully incorporated by use of a life course perspective charting changes and ruptures caused by an experience of abuse and subsequent relationship with disclosure. The following framework, which has emerged and developed from this research, is a culmination of the literature and theories researched as part of this study. The following sections explains the development of the framework, from an initial tool used to think about the before and after effects of abuse to a more comprehensive life course perspective incorporating the above-mentioned theories.

## A Theoretical Framework of Adult Disclosures

### *The Point of Disclosure*

The central research question of this project is ‘What are adult's experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services’? The focus of the study is therefore on this interaction between adult and social worker. For the purposes of this study this interaction is being termed the ‘point of disclosure’. This was initially adopted to assist in conceptualising a ‘before and after’ context; incorporating the development of the child who was abused, negotiating the various familial, societal, cultural and personal experiences prior to disclosing as an adult (See Figure 13). This research acknowledges that the individuals who participated may have disclosed previously in different ways as discussed by Alaggia (2010) but in this instance, we focus solely on this disclosure to social work services.

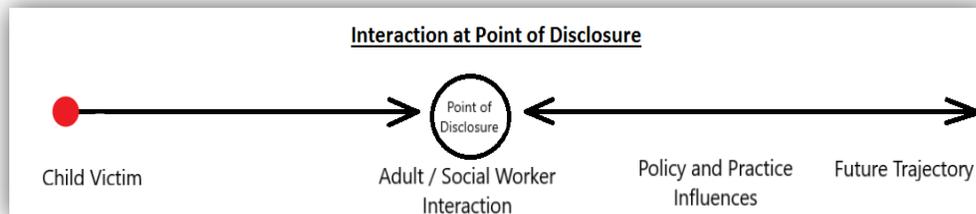


Figure 13: *The Point of Disclosure (Basic)*

### *Ecological Model*

Given the factors that impact upon disclosure as highlighted previously and as specifically referenced by Alaggia and Collin Vézina in terms of the ecological model the next stage of development of the framework was to populate an ecological model highlighting the influences acting upon the above ‘point of disclosure’. This incorporates some of the relevant theories discussed here such

as the social work-adult interaction as examined via the ethics of care. It also seeks to present how social constructionism has influence on all levels of the adult's experiences, direct and indirect and how power results from the adult's inter-relationship with such influences. This stage of the model also highlights the key relationship which is the focus of this research namely that adult and social worker interaction and where this sits in the wider ecological model. Also highlighted here is how the model fits with existing research in the field by incorporating Collin-Vézina et al's three levels of barriers; from within, in relation to others, and in relation to the social world (2015) (See Figure 14).

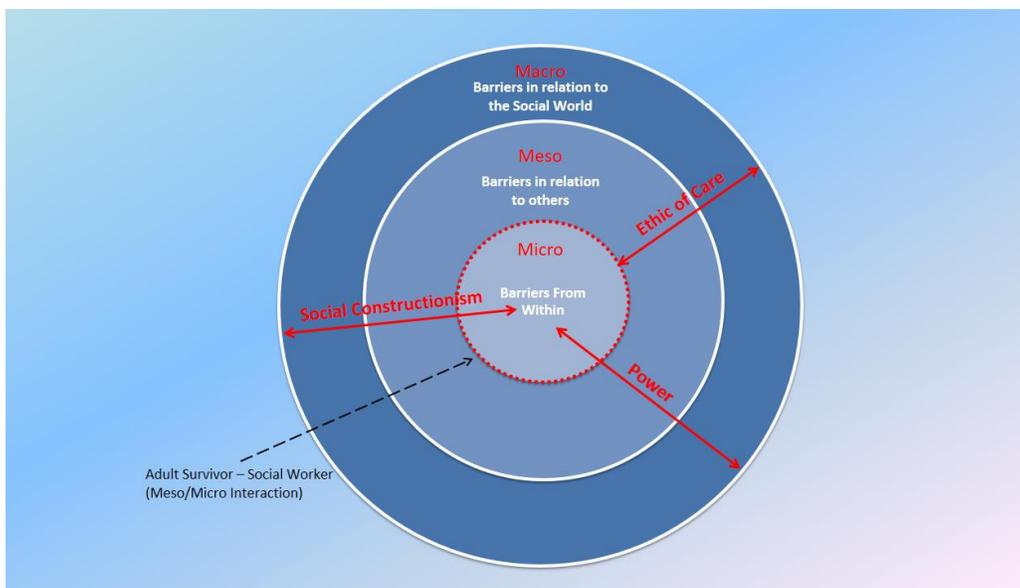


Figure 14: The ecological system relating to disclosure

The next stage of the framework shows a synthesis of both the point of disclosure and the ecological frame and begins to incorporate the chronosphere which supports Hunter (2011) and Easton's (2013) view of disclosure as a life course event. This stage of the model also begins to incorporate the possible influences, that arise in the literature, which may impact upon the adult and the point of disclosure (See Figure 15).

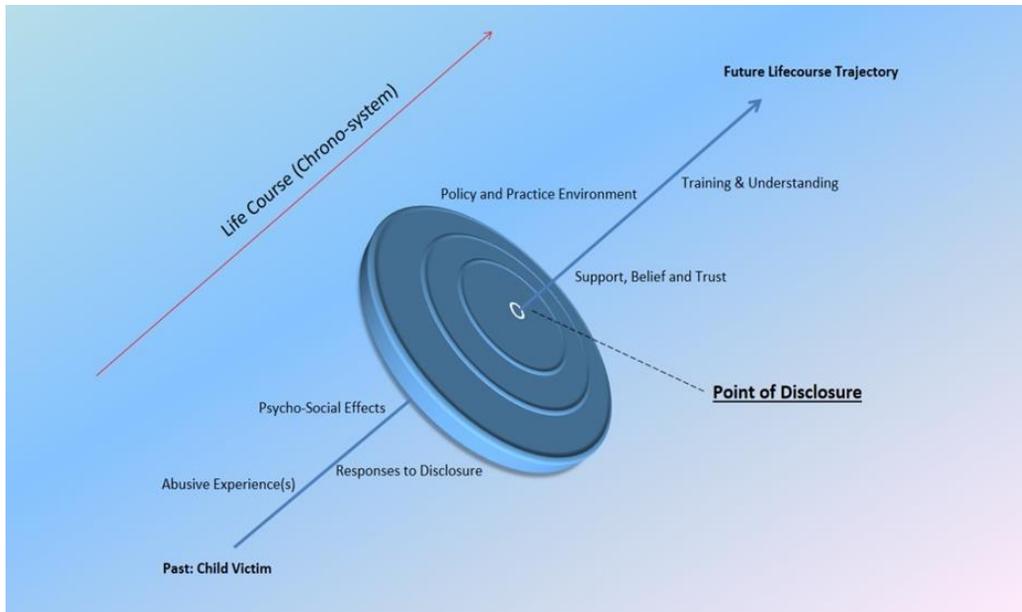


Figure 15: Ecological System including chronosystem (adult's phenomenological experience)

### *Rationale for the Theoretical Framework*

The final version of the framework incorporates all aspects and more fully establishes the life course perspective by showing how each impacting factor, or rupture, can potentially change the life course trajectory of the adult. The key function of this framework is to, initially, frame the various theories being used here and the facets of disclosure and, laterally, to assist social work practitioners in how to use an holistic and life course perspective when engaging with service users who have experienced childhood trauma and whom are impacted by multiple past and current influences and how future negative influences may be reduced or avoided.

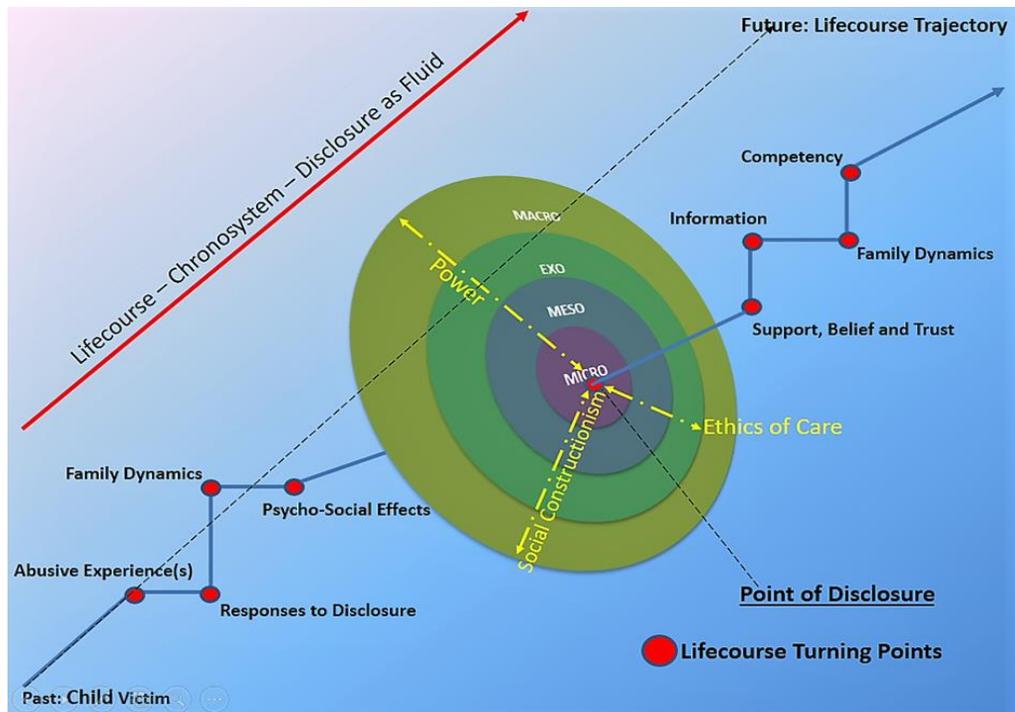


Figure 16: Proposed Theoretical Framework of Adult Disclosures of Abuse

## Summary

This chapter has set out the ontological and epistemological stance adopted within this research. It highlights ‘the self’ within the study and in doing so links back to the personal statement provided in chapter one, emphasising the importance of personal voice and experience within the study. The research takes a social constructionist stance, assuming that knowledge regarding a given phenomenon is socially, culturally and politically mediated. This form of social constructionist inquiry, as Gergen puts it, seeks to examine how people come to explain the world around them. In examining the specific phenomenon, the interaction between adult and social worker, the study emphasises the role that power plays in this interaction. The author acknowledges the many and varied theorisations of power and highlights specific examples that are adopted within this research. Foucault’s earlier work is emphasised due to its focus on power as resultant from relationships and, in keeping with the objective of the

study to examine facilitators and barrier, that power is neither positive nor negative but can ultimately be used to either end. The analysis of the specific interaction is further aided by use of the ethics of care theory and its focus on human interaction and ‘knowing and understanding’ the individual with David Howes approach of ‘accept me, understand me, talk to me’ speaking to the core of this research. The chapter then presents how these various theoretical approaches can hang upon an ecological framework to demonstrate where they fit in the adults’ experience of disclosure to social work services. Again, the emphasis is placed on individual voice by adopting Bronfenbrenner’s framework and its underlying assumption that how the environment is perceived by the individual is what matters. The social constructionist approach complimented with theories of power and ethics of care within an ecological framework bring us closer to understanding the overall adults’ experience of disclosure. It is argued in this study, with support from existing research, that disclosure and abuse begin a journey that the point of the abusive experience and that the relationship between the two is fluid and sometimes indecipherable as they play out over the lifecourse. In this light, an overarching lifecourse perspective is adopted within this study to best examine the adults’ experiences of disclosure to social work services, the work of Glen Elder is discussed in this regard. The use of a life course perspective also draws our attention to the significance of life course ‘ruptures’ or ‘turning points’ and how these can affect the trajectory of an individual’s life course.

The culmination of this scholarship is the development of a theoretical framework which incorporates all the above. The framework was initially developed to aid the author to understand the interplay of influences that surround and are present with the disclosure event to social work services. Future uses of the framework are discussed in respect of the findings of this research in the later discussion and conclusion chapters.

## **Chapter Five: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This project began via a critical and in-depth exploration of the literature relating to child sexual abuse. While conducting this review of the literature the author became aware of the socially constructed nature of much of the discourse surrounding child sexual abuse and those who have experienced it. Some of this related to the construction of commonly used labels such as ‘survivor’ and ‘victim’ while other aspects related to the very existence of child sexual abuse as a phenomenon (as discussed by Olafson, 1993 and Masson, 1992; chapter 2). The acknowledgement of this socially constructed nature of the subject matter led the author to move from what was initially planned to be a policy-based piece of research using a Participatory Action Research methodology to a more exploratory, phenomenological, piece of research. The author assumed the view that, because so many aspects of the subject matter are socially, politically and culturally mediated, in order to capture the experiences of disclosure by those who have been abused, a methodology that would allow the participant’s voice to speak for itself would be required. Referring to the influence of feminists and feminist literature in breaking the silence relating to the prevalence and incidence of incest, Masson speaks about the ‘power’ of personal experience; ‘how different this literature is from the standard psychiatric literature, not just in its power to move us emotionally, but also in the courage to tell the truth, and to tell it in the words that belong to the real events’ (Masson, 1992, p xviii). These works further focused the author’s attention on the relative experiences of the adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. If the theories and writings have been so obviously manipulated and crafted by the dominant discourses of the day, then to better represent the experience and effects of childhood sexual abuse one must go to

the source; the adult themselves. This, by its very nature, implies the creation of a relationship and power is imminent to such (Foucault, 1979).

The following chapter details the process of research design and methodology selection involved in this research. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the research process followed by a discussion of the author's learnings from two research trips to McGill University, Montreal and the University of New Hampshire, USA. These research visits were crucial in grounding the chosen methodology and securing ethical approval for research in such a sensitive area. They also exposed the author to academic experts in the field. This section leads to a discussion of the the chosen methodology, Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology (BNIM) and how this selection was justified in relation to the central research question. The methodology itself is then detailed and the practical procedures of its usage are presented. The sampling technique and a description of the research sample is then outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the potential obstacles and ethical issues which were foreseen and limitations of the research are also addressed.

### Central Research Question, Aims and Objectives

The central research question of this study is concerned with exploring *what are adult's experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services?* The study addresses the following aims:

- What are the facilitators and barriers for adults making disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services?
- How does the current disclosure process within the child protection system and its underlying policies take account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced child sexual abuse, and
- What are the policy recommendations that can inform social work practice in this area?

## Social Work Research: Positioning

*As social work is an evolving, dynamic profession, it requires a solid evidence base to advance and develop responsive and sustainable practice*

(Alston and Bowles, 2013, p3)

This study examines the experiences of adults who engage with social work services regarding experiences of childhood sexual abuse. While the central research question examines what those experiences are, the overall study is situated in the realm of social work research; how can these experiences assist social work practice and policy, what are the experiences of current practice and policy. According to Orme and Briar-Lawson (2010) ‘a distinctive feature of social work research is that its focus is, or at least should be, on both policy and practice; the structural and the individual’ (IN Shaw et al, 2013, p49). In saying this, Orme and Briar-Lawson add that social work research does not tend to be about researching policy directly but more the effects of policy or phenomena that should be the subject of policy. This thesis adopts a largely socio-legal perspective to examine the various policy and legal aspects of disclosing childhood abuse to social work services but is ultimately concerned with how current policy affects adults who have experienced abuse.

Orme and Briar-Lawson also discuss the ‘dilemmas’ (Hammersley, 2003) in social work research and specifically its relationship with policy development and ultimately with the development of theory. They suggest that often the ‘status of theory in influencing policy is tenuous’ and that ‘those undertaking research and generating knowledge have also failed to influence the profession of social work’ (2013, pp51-52). Orme and Briar-Lawson chart the trends and traditions in social work research over time and suggest that the ‘origins of social work practice could be said to be associated with the early traditions in

social research' (2013, p53). They discuss the traditions in the mid to late 1800s of collecting data on social problems. They reference the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in 1832 as well as the role of early charity groups such as the Charity Organisation Society (p53). They note that such 'surveys of social conditions' at this time did manage to bring about social changes and specifically changes in public health in Britain at the time. However, they note that towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the focus began to shift to examining the causes of such social phenomena as opposed to a charting of their extent. This has culminated, since the 1970s, in the development of methods to 'help understand and interpret the conditions' people were experiencing (p53). Orme and Briar-Lawson bring us right up to the end of the twentieth century citing a study by Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) which undertook a critical review of welfare research. Williams et al highlighted that welfare research, including social work, attempts to:

...mediate the relationship between agency and structure: to acknowledge that welfare research has to capture both individual biographies, identities and values but understand these in prevailing structures informed by policy and discourse...

(Orme and Briar Lawson (2010) citing Williams et al, 1999 IN Shaw et al. 2013, p54)

In this we are moving towards a contemporary view of social work research and social work practice and therefore we can see how Orme and Briar-Lawson's technique of charting the two side-by-side stands up. They highlight this stating that 'the focus on the individual resonates with social work's commitment to see the person in their environment' (p54). It is proffered that social work research's innate capacity to hold the micro and the macro when assessing social issues situates this study in a promising environment in which to address the central research question posed. The proposed theoretical framework

presented in the previous chapter seeks to provide a tool to allow us to examine both micro and macro across the life course.

Shaw, Ramatowski and Ruckdeschel (2013) produced a 'research note' comparing the uses of qualitative research in social work, the research populations under study and the issues being researched. They populated a table based on the analysis of 237 papers published in the *Qualitative Social Work Journal* over a ten-year period. They found that while research shifted in the later years of the study to focus more so on service-users and potential service users, the areas of children and families and mental health remained a consistent focus. They established that 'Adult Offenders/Victims' were the subject of three out of the 242 studies examined (Shaw et al, 2013, p737. See Appendix 6). Added to this is the dearth of knowledge regarding adults with histories of childhood sexual abuse and their engagement with social work services. This study aims to work towards filling this gap in knowledge and contributing in a more general sense to this area of social work research. In contrast to the research subject matter, Shaw et al highlighted that out of 180 different methodologies utilised, 45 of these were narrative approaches, second only to general interview methodologies (2013, p243) demonstrating the popularity or applicability of narrative research within social work. Furthermore, the majority of studies sought to understand and explain issues related to risk, vulnerability and abuse (See Appendix 7).

In their comprehensive 2014 text, *Doing Qualitative Research in Social Work*, Shaw and Holland continue this examination of social work research. Using the above table from Shaw et al (2013) they focus on 'vulnerability' featuring in the highest proportion of studies examined and pose the question of 'what is meant by sensitive research' (2014, p24). They suggest that ethical issues within 'sensitive research' and ethical issues within other forms of research are not necessarily different 'but rather they call for more explicit attention. This issue will be discussed further in the section below on Ethical Considerations, but is flagged here, not as an exclusive feature of social work research, but most

definitely a pertinent one. To address certain anticipated ethical issues within this research I sought out international experts in the field who had conducted similar studies so that I could learn from them and assist in the design of this research study. The following section therefore details my research visit to McGill University in Montreal and to the University of New Hampshire, US.

#### Preparation for Research: Learnings from experts in the field.

In addition to the study being situated in the wider field of social work research it was clear having conducted the literature review that this research was more specifically positioned within the scholarship relating to childhood sexual abuse disclosure. A review of the literature highlighted a number of key authors who have conducted similar studies in the past namely Rosaleen McElvaney, who has examined youth disclosure in an Irish context, Ramona Alaggia, who utilised an ecological perspective to examine disclosure of childhood abuse, David Finkelhor, who has published extensively on many aspects of child sexual abuse and who also developed the four stage traumagenic model used to explain the effects of such abuse, and Delphine Collin-Vézina at McGill University who at the time this PhD was commencing had just completed a preliminary mapping exercise in respect of facilitators and barriers to adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse.

I sought to learn from these researcher's experiences and how they designed their respective projects. I spent a period of three weeks at McGill University developing my research question and approach within the Centre for Research on Children and Families under the supervision of Dr. Collin-Vézina. Dr Collin-Vézina who is the Canadian Chair in Child Welfare and who has concluded a research project entitled 'Disclosure Pathways' (Collin-Vézina et al, 2014). This project examined the factors which inhibit or promote the disclosure of childhood sexual abuse and the project focused on the experiences

of adults in this respect. The project was therefore similar in many respects to my own PhD research. I researched its ethical application and feedback process, transcripts of data collected from adults who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and recruitment and information materials used in the project. I also had access to Dr. Collin-Vézina, the project leader, and to the lead research assistant on the project to ask any questions and further develop the approach to my own research.

A key learning from this process was the importance of examining both facilitators and barriers relating to disclosure to social work. This learning influenced the use of an open ended BNIM interview style, discussed in a later section, which allowed the participants to share both positive and or negative experiences if they so wished. This research trip also helped me to establish the parameters of my research sample, any safeguards I needed to put in place prior to and during the interview stage and theoretical frameworks to consider when beginning to analyse the data.

In the fourth week of my month-long placement I arranged a visit to meet with Professor David Finkelhor at the University of New Hampshire. The aim of this visit was to present my proposed research to Professor Finkelhor and gain his valued insight in respect of the research design and method. Professor Finkelhor provided advice in respect of sampling and highlighted the somewhat unique nature of the study in that in the US adult disclosures of childhood abuse are almost exclusively dealt with by law enforcement and not child protection services.

An issue during discussions in both McGill and New Hampshire was the potential difference in 'quality' of data given the participants experiences within therapeutic services. Due to sampling via a therapeutic and advocacy organisation, acting as a Gate-Keeper, the participants would potentially have (a) a certain level of coping skills in relation to discussing and understanding their experiences of abuse, (b) and certain terminology and language in which they could now discuss and describe their experiences and (c) a potentially

unique experience in relation to disclosing to child protection social workers. These aspects are potential limitations of the research in that they may not represent the experiences of disclosure amongst the general population. This research trip provided me with invaluable access to world experts in the field of disclosure and significantly contributed to how this research was designed and conducted, which the following section discusses in greater detail.

## Research Design

This study consists of five main stages; the following is a brief overview:

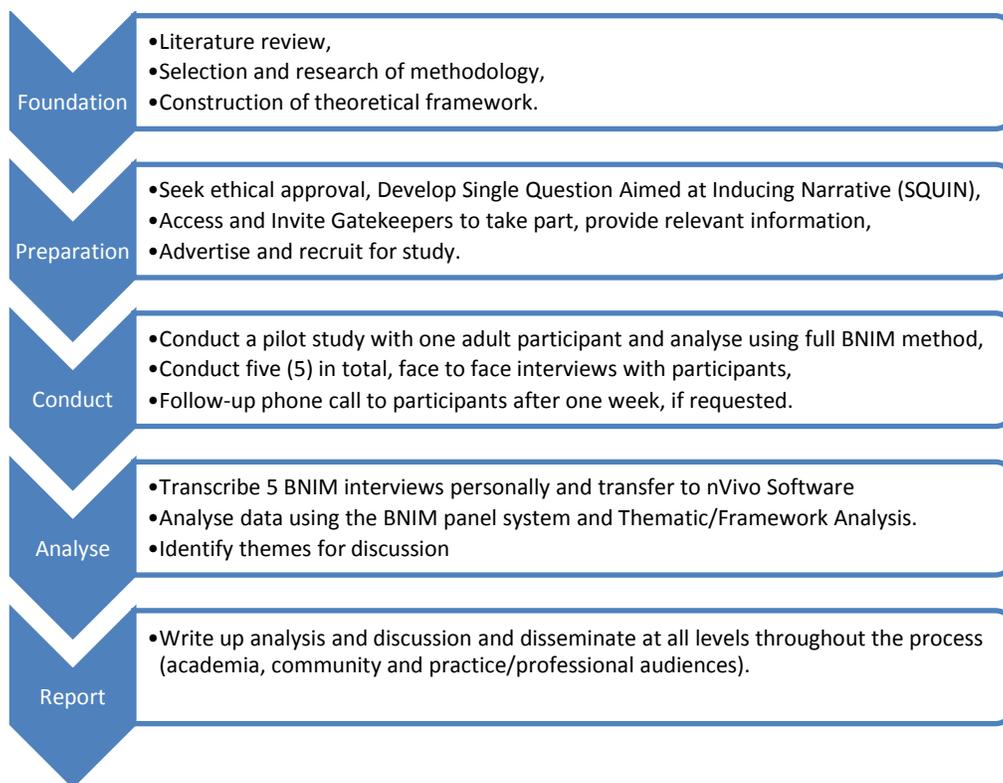


Figure 17: Outline of Research Design

## Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology

‘Choices about paradigms and research frameworks are influenced by the phenomenon being investigated, the research objectives and research questions’ (Corbally and O’Neill, 2014, p34). It is the author’s opinion that experiences of child sexual abuse cannot be generalised and so applying solely statistical, quantitative models of knowledge to such research would be inadequate. As stated earlier in this chapter, this research sits within the wider ethos of social work research which attempts to hold both the macro (socio-legal) and the micro (individual voice) and analyse them in tandem and as they relate and interact with one another. Each adult’s experience of child sexual abuse is fundamentally different and individual and so to create a set of knowledges around such experiences we must be open to and accepting of relative accounts of events, happenings and feelings. While all personal experiences are relative it is proffered that narrative methodology, in tandem with an interdisciplinary contextual background, can be utilised to thematically gather such experiences. While each of us experiences and views a different rainbow, a picture of a rainbow is viewed similarly by all.

Listening to and making sense of peoples’ narratives is one of the core aspects of the role of a social worker. The central aim of this study is to explore adult’s lived experiences of disclosure to child protection social work services in the Republic of Ireland. It was therefore necessary to select a methodology that allowed for rich, in-depth, phenomenological exploration while also respecting and presenting individual voice. Corbally and O’Neill (2014) state that ‘many methodological approaches and methods fail to fully account for the historical, psycho-social and biographical dynamic of people’s lives’ (2014, p34). A biography may be defined as ‘the process of accounting for an individual’s life history or life story (Corbally and O’Neill, 2014, p35). Biographical narrative research was chosen to achieve this aim due to its ‘aptness for exploring subjective and cultural formations, tracing interactions between the personal

and the social' (Chamberlayne and King, 2000, p9). This tracing of interaction between personal and social also further compliments the use of an ecological framework in this research at a socio-cultural level, community, family, religion and societal institutions can shape individual's narratives and the selection of the BNIM methodology is influenced by this perspective (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014).

Wengraf (2001) notes that 'biographical narratives are powerfully expressive of the natures of particular persons, cultures and milieu, and they are valuable instruments for a large range of social and psychological research theory-questions because they present to the researcher embedded and tacit assumptions, meanings, reasonings and patterns of action and inaction' (2001, p116). They serve as a conduit through which one can examine a social phenomenon on many, inter-connected, levels of influence. Acknowledging at all times that at the core of such an approach is 'interpretivism'; the participant's interpretation of their experiences, the researcher's interpretation of the data collected and the reader's interpretation of its presentation in the thesis. 'BNIM acknowledges the pervasive nature of interpretivism by recognising the subjectivity of participants and researchers' (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014, p36).

Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology, one such approach to collecting and analysing biographical narrative data, was initial developed from an approach used in the SOSTRIS research project (Social Strategies in Risk Society) (Chamberlayne and Rustin, 1999). It can be used to gather data relating to whole life histories or parts of life (Corbally and O'Neill, 2016, p35). As part of this PhD the researcher undertook a 5-day intensive training programme in the use of BNIM facilitated in London by Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne.

BNIM gathers rich qualitative data and collection and analysis of data from a large sample is neither feasible nor recommended. The sample size consists of 5 participants. The sample is representative of studies that apply BNIM and

similar narrative methodologies (Bradley, 2014; Corbally and O’Neill, 2014). The methodology itself has two main components; data collection and data analysis. It is possible to use the BNIM data collection process to gather data later to be analysed using a different methodology but the use of the BNIM analysis is only feasible with BNIM data (Corbally and O’Neill, 2014; Wengraf, 2001). This research used both BNIM data collection and BNIM data analyses stages on one interview while using an alternative, thematic analysis, for the remaining four interviews.

### *BNIM Data Collection*

The BNIM data collection method itself is composed of three Sub-session. The first of these is the use of a SQUIN (Single Question Used to Induce Narrative) (Wengraf, 2001, Wengraf, 2017). This involves the posing of a single, carefully designed question to prompt the interviewee to provide a free narrative. During the interviewee’s response to this SQUIN the researcher must not speak to, prompt, direct or otherwise endorse or discourage the interviewee’s response or direction. There lies an inherent ‘risk’ in this process in that the interviewee, free to answer how they wish without interruption, could veer in the opposite direction to the focus or foci of the central research question. A carefully designed SQUIN seeks to limit this possibility but can never rule it out. Furthermore, a critical part of receiving the response to the SQUIN is being aware of your own and the interviewee’s emotional state, recognising this and taking time out of the interview process to manage this if needed (Wengraf, 2017). The design of the SQUIN used in this study is discussed below.

The second stage of the BNIM data collection process occurs once the interviewee has exhausted their free narrative stage or does not wish to add anything further. A short interlude is provided at this point and the interviewer has an opportunity to reflect on any notes they have made and may ask follow-up questions to the interviewee. These questions must be based solely on the

data collected, using the language provided by the interviewee, known as cue phrases, and posed in the order in which they arose (Wengraf, 2001; Bradley, 2014; Dalikeni, 2012). The interviewer must ask the interviewee a question from the beginning of their response to the SQUIN, questions from the mid region of the response and finally a question from the final part of the free narrative. The rationale for this is that the questions do not interrupt the ‘flow’ of the interviewee’s narrative and reflect its chronology and language as closely as possible.

The goal of these questions is to search for what the method calls PINs or Particular Incident Narratives (Wengraf, 2001; Wengraf 2017). Unfortunately, within his training and ‘Detailed Guide to BNIM (2017) Wengraf does not define a PIN or lay out criteria that classifies when one arises. Instead PINs are discussed in terms of who to find, or ‘push’ for them in the second sub session. That said, it is possible to glean from Wengraf and others that PINs tend to be pieces of the narrative that hint at a deeper or further story or experience on the part of the interviewee. A successful ‘push’ for PINs may yield a rich narrative. This ‘protection’ of the participant’s personal narrative was a significant factor in the selection of this methodology for this research project. While additional questions were asked of the participants in this study during the second sub-session, some of the richest PINs arose in their own right during the participants free-narratives. These PINs, while addressing the central research question, went further to yield richer, time-situated, and detail descriptive of specific events in tandem with the participants’ inner most reflective thoughts in relation to same. The main findings of this research are presented following a process of thematic analysis, however these PINs are presented separately as they present deep insight into the very specific experiences of the participants relating to areas of the research such as effects of abuse, reaction to disclosure and interaction with services.

In using this methodology, the researcher must ‘for as long as possible give up control refuse to take up offers of partial control and maintain the maximum of

power-asymmetry' (Wengraf, 2001, p113; See also Rosenthal, 2003). Given the research topic and potential influences of power dynamics, issues regarding trust and belief and a general potential discomfort in discussing traumatic events the use of a data collection methodology that provided much of control to the participant was critical to this project. The third stage, or third sub-session, allows the researcher/interviewer to pose un-structured questions regarding issues of interest in respect of the research question that may not have arisen in the narrative. While any method has blind spots that focus attention on highly selected aspects of a problem while blocking it out for others, the rationale of the initial SQUIN is that the interviewee is provided with an opportunity to speak freely, unprompted, about the topic or subject in question. It is a further rationale that this response will be provided in the interviewee's own words and language, reflecting their interpretation and their experience using their meanings. This research did not use this final sub-session as it was felt that it countered the efforts in sub-sessions one and two to gather the interviewee's narrative with as little interference or influence as possible. The methodology allows for use of sub-session one and two without resort to, what is commonly referred to as an optional, sub-session three (Wengraf, 2001; Wengraf, 2017).

Once these data have been collected the methodology advises that the researcher takes some time immediately after each interview to write up reflective field notes. These aim to assist with the researcher's interpretation of the data collected and note any issues that arise in terms of the central research question of use of the methodology. The researcher also used this time to note any emerging or identified themes from the data as it was being collected. 'Easily skimmed and not taken seriously, rich-field notes are crucial to supplementing your tape and for starting the post-session process of your informal tacit sense making' (Wengraf, 2017).

### *Single Question Used to Induce Narrative*

Wengraf explains that SQUINs are relevant in addressing a number of theory questions; whether interested in a person's biography in its own right or because it may represent the working of a particular social mechanism (2001, p114). The SQUIN used in this research was designed as follows and utilised a framework designed by Tom Wengraf which aims to provide a sufficiently focused question to answer a given research question while allowing the interviewee to respond using their own free narrative. The question used here resembles, in its design and layout, SQUINs used in other research projects:

*“As you will know from the information about the study I am researching adult's experiences of disclosing or referring childhood sexual abuse to social work services.*

*I'm interested in what it is like for an adult who has experienced childhood sexual abuse to refer that experience, or those experiences, to a child protection social worker.*

*I'd like to hear your story of that experience. You can start at whatever point you wish, I won't interrupt or say anything throughout and will only listen and take some brief notes for some follow up questions later.”*

Wengraf (2017) highlights 'key principles of BNIM interviewing' in his intensive 5-day training workshop and it is useful to provide a recap of these here:

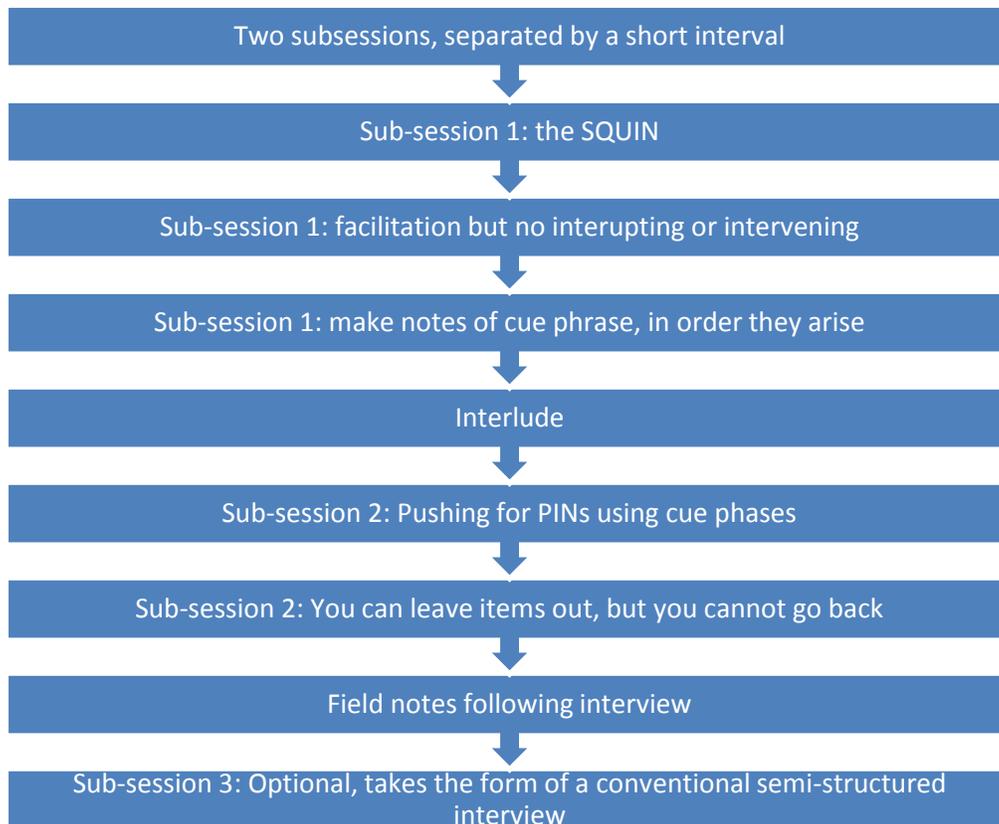


Figure 18: Key Principles of BNIM Interviewing (Wengraf, 2017)

### *BNIM Data Analysis*

BNIM utilises an open and free narrative form of data collection. Much of the control, apart from the initial SQUIN, is in the hands of the participant regarding what to share or discuss and what direction to take when responding and for how long they wish to speak. As stated, it was this level of ‘control’ in the hands of the participants that marked BNIM out as an appropriate data collection method for this study. While free and open in its data collection BNIM is ‘rigorously defined and sequenced’ in its process of analysis (Wengraf, 2001, p232). The analysis follows two main ‘tracks’. It requires the transcripts of data to be separated in to a ‘Biographical Data Chronology’ (BDC) and a ‘Text Structure Sequentialisation (TSS). The BDC ‘expresses the ‘objective’ data about the person’s life’ (Wengraf, 2001, p236) while the TSS

incorporates a ‘series of structural changes in a biographical account’ (Ibid, p239) or a representation of ‘how the story was told’. To put it simply the first track provides ‘objective’ facts of the story while the second track provided ‘subjective’ data related to how the story was told. The following is an example of an extract from a participant interview split in to both a BDC ‘chunk’ and latterly, a TSS ‘chunk’:

**BDC – Segments of fact (*what was said*):**

*“Disclosed to my family and immediately referred to a psychiatrist at thirty years old”*

(Jane)

**TSS - Segments of emotion/narrative (*how it was said*):**

*“So am, disclosed to my family and was referred to a psychiatrist, ah on the basis of getting a baseline take on what was the damage done, what are we dealing with, I do come from a medical background so it was a natural course of action for them to want to take in terms of protecting me and wanting to understand what the hell they were dealing with.”*

(Jane)

This process of separation and presentation was completed for one whole transcript and included 40 data chunks in each track. Each track was then presented in turn to an interpretive panel using the BNIM panel analysis method.

*Panel Analysis*

BNIM analysis is time consuming and resource heavy in that it utilises a series of panel-based interpretive sessions. Wengraf (2001) outlines the make-up and rationale for an interpretive panel:

The principal is that there should be a panel of at least two for this task. If you can find six people, so much the better. The more different from each other they are the more ‘objective’ your results

are likely to be. This is because such work is best done by a collective of people unlike the researcher and both like and unlike the informant. If you only work on the basis of the mental models derived from and generated in your own personal history and your own 'case-limitations' your one-person panel sociological imagination will be weak and partial... The more the diversity of those involved the better and more interesting the work of analysis becomes

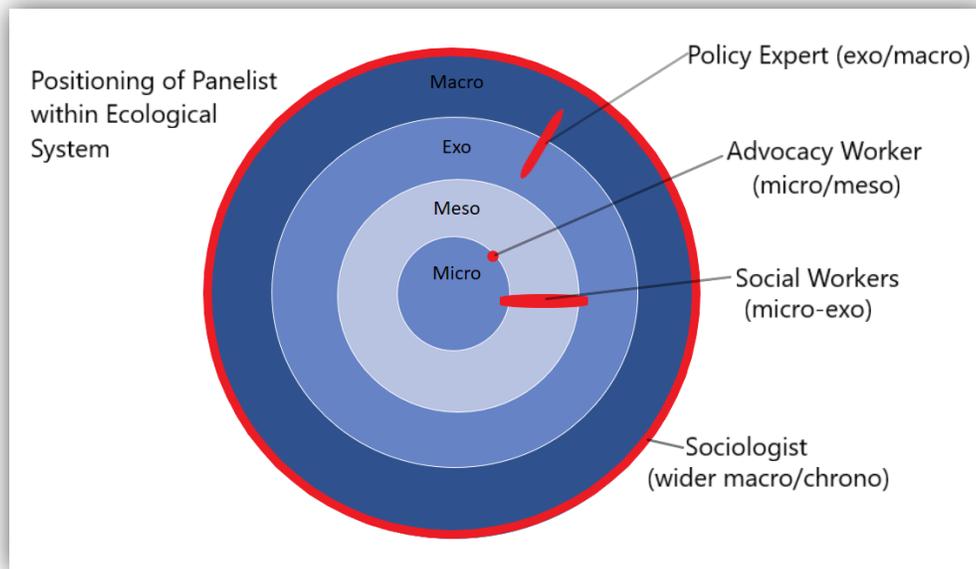
(Wengraf, 2001, p.260)

For the purposes of this research an interpretive panel was used for the analysis of one interview. In keeping with the theoretical underpinnings of the research, the researcher sought to reflect the various levels of the ecological model within the make-up of the panel members whilst also acknowledging Chamberlayne et al's advice that:

The more intercultural and cross-cultural the panel, the more 'sleeping assumptions' of any given researcher are likely to be disturbed and raised to consciousness, thereby often forcing a clarification and a rectification of the researcher's theory of subjectivity.

(Chamberlayne et al., 2000, p. 102).

The panel included an advocacy worker in the area of sexual abuse and violence (micro/meso), two practitioners from the areas of child sexual abuse assessment and frontline social work practice (meso/exo), a policy expert in the field of child protection and welfare (exo/macro) and a sociologist for the wider socio-ecological or macro/chrono perspective. This panel was conducted in two sessions as per the methodology.



*Figure 19: Position of Panellists within an ecological system*

The panel were provided with the SQUIN that was presented to all participants and then exposed to the first track, Biographical Data Analysis, which contains the ‘facts’ of the participants story with all subjective terminology and references removed. The panel was then invited to comment on each chunk and engage in ‘future blind hypothesising’ providing what they thought might occur next in the sequence or thoughts on how the adult may have experienced the particular scenario being presented. Hypotheses were then either confirmed or refuted by the presentation of the next data chunk (Wengraf, 2001; 2017). The goal of this process is to breakdown any in-built preconceptions or biases within the researcher. Once the panel have commented and discussed each of these ‘fact chunks’ in chronological order they were provided with a recess before they were then exposed to the second track, the Text Structure Sequentialisation (TSS). The comments of the panellist were recorded by the researcher in real-time and visible to all members to reflect on throughout the process. The researcher used Microsoft PowerPoint and a display monitor to

present the comments in real-time. Figures 23 and 24 below show how the above examples of BDC and TSS were presented and commented upon:

**“Disclosed to my family and immediately referred to a psychiatrist at thirty years old”**

Colm	Elaine	Phil	Susan	Stacey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who chose the psychiatrist?</li> <li>Is it something so bad that it needed to be referred at that level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to silence the victim, disclosed to circle of trust and referred to such a high level</li> <li>Stigma and trust in terms of disclosure.</li> <li>Initial reaction to disclosure and importance of this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did the person raise it to the family.</li> <li>Was it a blow out?</li> <li>Was the family supporting that person?</li> <li>Was it forced or was there engagement?</li> <li>Was it the family pushing.</li> <li>Family dynamics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience of feeling out of control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Living with this for a very long time, then immediate help, did this help?</li> <li>How did this process look, take place?</li> <li>Not necessarily a negative.</li> <li>Sense of relief initially maybe</li> <li>Public aspect and stigma</li> </ul>

Figure 20: Panel Analysis of BDC Chunk

**“So am, disclosed to my family and was referred to a psychiatrist, ah on the basis of getting a baseline take on what was the damage done, what are we dealing with, I do come from a medical background so it was a natural course of action for them to want to take in terms of protecting me and wanting to understand what the hell they were dealing with.”**

Colm	Elaine	Phil	Susan	Stacey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They have intellectualised it.</li> <li>This is how my family deals with it.</li> <li>Working in this area, not disciplined area, its about skills, one of the best examples with a male guard and child, with limited training, right person right time</li> <li>I don't know how she is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internalised it</li> <li>The family's perspective</li> <li>What damage is done</li> <li>What are we dealing with</li> <li>Medical family, interesting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family has maybe helped</li> <li>But I don't know,</li> <li>Staying positive but a bit of a third party</li> <li>Specific technical words not the emotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the beginning, they have told you that they come from a medical background,</li> <li>Are they trying to get you to see them as a certain type of person</li> <li>Subjectivity</li> <li>Will frame things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What 'they' were dealing with</li> <li>Not how I am dealing</li> <li>She sees it positively</li> <li>Strange gap in feelings about it</li> </ul>

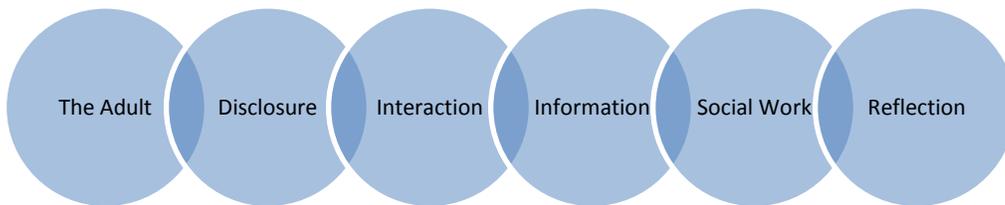
Figure 21: Panel Analysis of corresponding TSS chunk

Following the analysis of the BDC track the researcher develops a Biographic Data Analysis which helps to inform the next stage of analysis. This focuses on constructing a contextualised lived-life within a wider socio-historical structure (Wengraf, 2001; Bradley, 2014). This led to themes regarding power, infantilisation, experience of disclosure and facilitators emerging from the initial analysis before moving on to analysis of the TSS. Data produced from this overall process was then utilised in the secondary, selective coding, stage of the overall data analysis. Where ‘power’ moved from a significant theme to an over-arching feature represented in all interviews collected. Other themes such as ‘facilitators’ became less significant but were replicated in findings from other transcripts. This latter process is described below.

### Thematic Data Analysis

As stated above it is possible and feasible to use alternative methods of analysis with data collected using the BNIM method. Due to the time and resource implications of running an interpretive panel for each interview transcript it was decided that the remaining interviews would be analysed using a thematic analysis method (Bryman, 2008). All interviews were recorded via dictaphone, with consent, and were personally transcribed by the researcher. These transcripts were thematically analysed line-by-line using NVivo 10 software. Themes were developed using open, axial and selective coding techniques. Open coding on the five transcripts resulted in an initial 61 open codes. These were then analysed to establish axial codes which identified similarities and differences between cases, metaphors being used, theory related themes and indigenous typologies or categories such as those relating to policy or law, or specific practices experienced by the adults (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Once the initial open codes were established the researcher allowed the secondary stage of coding to be influenced by the findings of the BNIM panel analysis process, which had been conducted on one transcript. Findings from that

process, as described above, were used to produce selective codes that arose as relevant across cases once all data had been analysed. This meant that the full BNIM method, while not used with all transcripts, still retained a beneficial purpose in the overall analysis. This axial and selective coding resulted in larger nodes or themes being developed to present a ‘story’ of the adults’ experiences of disclosure. The larger themes included the following:



*Figure 22: Themes resulting from synthesis of BNIM and Thematic Analysis*

This ‘story line’ presentation seeks to replicate the presentation of the literature review and theoretical framework and enable the reader to visualise a life course trajectory of an adult effected by childhood abuse. The themes begin with the adult themselves, their experience and interaction with disclosure, how this was managed by social work services in terms of information provided and the social work system itself and finally the adult’s reflections over time on the entire experience. These data were then placed within an ecological framework to highlight the societal, cultural, historical and political contexts of such lived-experiences. As detailed in the previous chapter, this perspective and method of analysis led to the development of a theoretical framework which acts as a tool through which to examine and adults experience of disclosure to social work services.

## Presentation of Data: Story told from ecological perspective

It was clear from the theoretical underpinnings of this research that an ecological framework was beneficial in examining the various influences and structures that some adults encounter, directly or indirectly, as they travel along the related life course trajectories of abuse and disclosure (See Theoretical Framework, p162, Chapter 4). Charting such influences within the data, and the subsequent development of the framework are key contributions of this research. As mentioned previously there is precedent for such an approach. Alaggia (2010) highlighted the following in respect of her method of analysis and data presentation:

When trying to make meaning of these data an ecological theoretical framework was used for organizing and analyzing the vast amount of information brought forward through the participants' narratives. In-depth analyses of the study data demonstrate a close fit with ecological theory. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Belsky's (1980) ecological theoretical framework initially used for understanding the interplay of factors contributing to child abuse, it became clear that this framework can also be extended to disclosure of CSA for a fuller understanding of child victims.

(Alaggia, 2010, p36)

Alaggia presented her data as they related to the various layers of the ecological model. Collin-Vézina et al (2015) later followed this method to examine facilitators and barriers to disclosure of child sexual abuse. Similarly, the data in this thesis is presented via the ecological systems framework. By way of recap from the theory chapter, the ecological model was initially devised in the 1970s by developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). The model contains various layers of influence which, Bronfenbrenner argued, all have either direct or indirect influence on the development of a child. The ecological model includes the layers of the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem and rests on the premise that an

individual can only be understood via and appreciation of these spheres (Alaggia, 2010).

The model is used here to emphasise how the experiences of the participants have been influenced by these layers. The use of this model also compliments the life course perspective adopted in this research to emphasis the effects of abuse over time but also to demonstrate how these effects are comparable to the effects of disclosure. In order to understand adults' experiences of disclosure and how to respond to in a person-centred manner this theoretical approach is used to argue that we need to view abuse and disclosure in tandem. We will see how the data can ebb and flow between ecological spheres and that these positional decisions are not rigid; presenting the inter-relation between spheres as described by Bronfenbrenner.

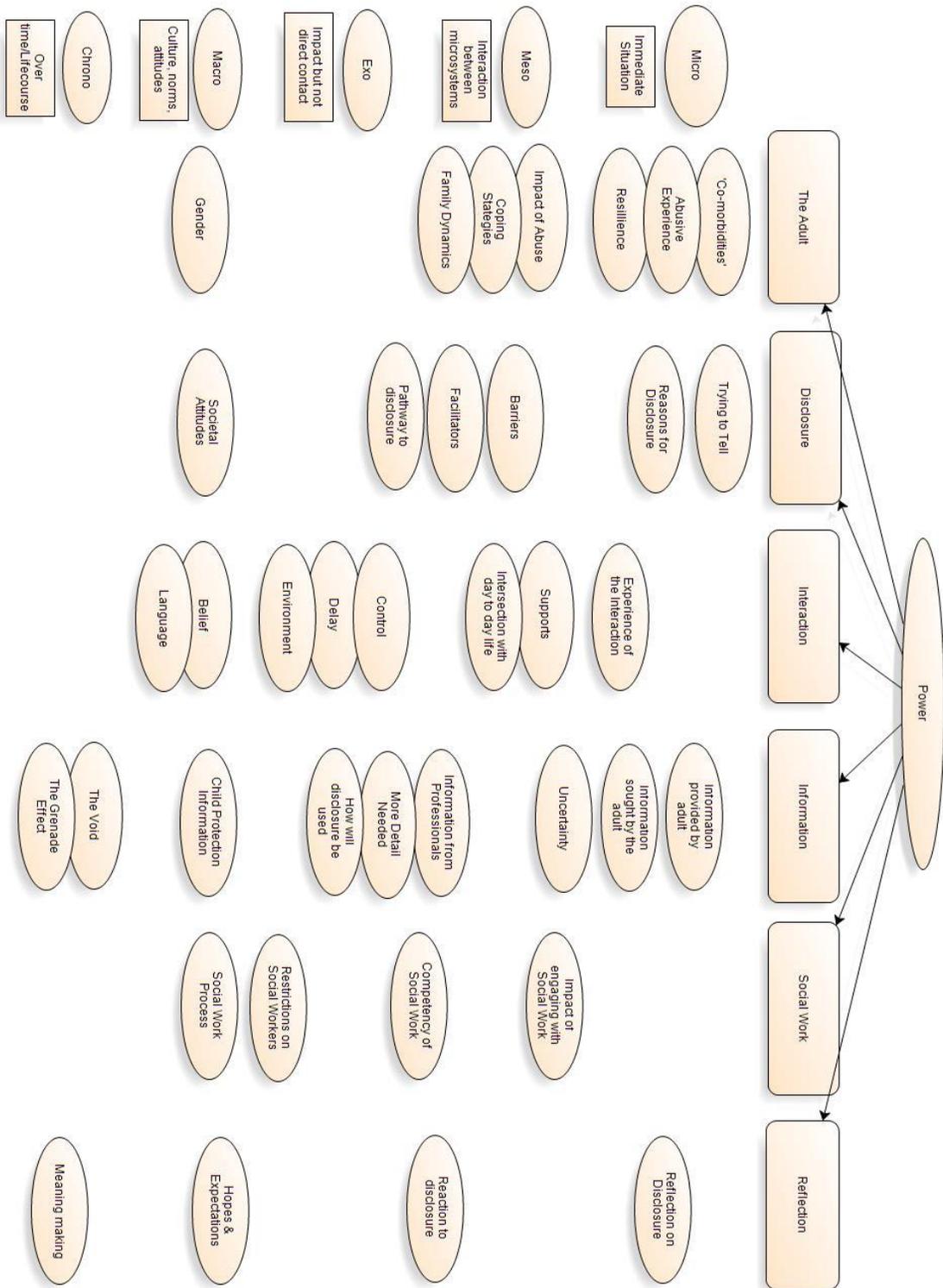


Figure 23: Data presented via ecological framework

### *Recruitment (Sample and Access)*

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the data collected as part of this research it was not feasible to sample participants from the wider general population. The sample included in this study therefore were accessed via an agency called One in Four. One of the key reasons for this was the organisation's access to adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, but more significantly the capacity for the organisation to recruit participants who they felt were able to participate in this study and to whom they could provide follow up supportive services where necessary. The participants in this study were individuals who received some therapy and counselling in respect of their experiences of abuse and who were potentially guided or supported through the experience of disclosing to a social work service. They were therefore a sample who may have had additional skills, language and understanding in respect of their abusive experience, their understanding of how this affects them as individuals and how to make a so called 'official disclosure'. The participants potentially presented a more formulated and reflective account of their disclosure experience to social work than may have been expected from the general population. This was also contributed to by the fact that, via the information packs, the adults were aware of the focus of the study and information about the process of how the information would be collected. The BINM methodology sought to reduce this input somewhat in that each adult was provided with the same information prior to the study and the SQUIN provided them with a simple prompt to begin a narrative which enabled participants to discuss what they wished. The resultant data must be viewed in this light and is potentially richer and more pertinent due to the purposeful free narrative approach.

For ethical and access purposes recruitment was conducted via a gatekeeping organisation who work with adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. There are several services in the Republic of Ireland who fulfil this role.

Predominantly there is the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and One in Four both based in Dublin with the latter acting nationally. In addition to this there is the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) who, while not acting as a direct service to adults, act as an information and oversight body for 15 national Rape Crisis Centres. Finally, there is also a National Counselling Service which is a State-run counselling service and does not exclusively deal with sexual abuse.

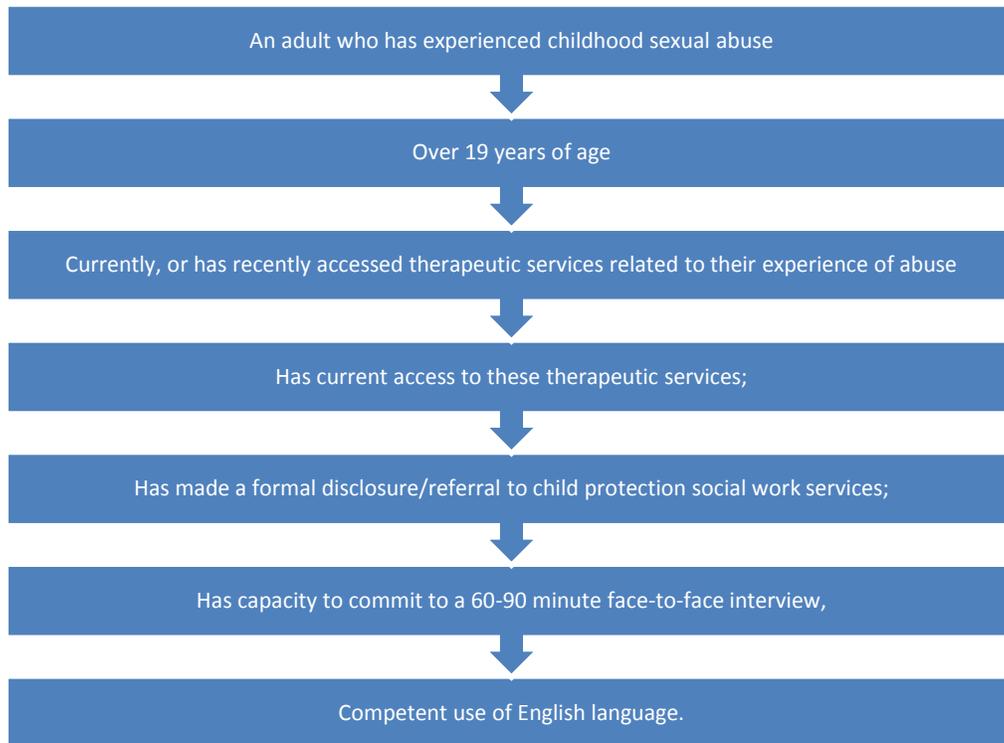
The researcher had previously conducted work on behalf of One in Four and had contacts within this service who were both interested in the study and willing to act as gatekeepers and therefore One in Four were chosen as a recruitment source. The researcher did not know any of the research participants prior to the study. The use of gatekeepers brings with it its own ethical and methodological considerations (Kennan, Fives and Canavan, 2012), this aimed to further reduce the potential harm to the participants in that therapeutic services were available throughout the duration of the research. However, it is important to note Becker-Blease and Freyd's warning regarding being overly protective of participants:

Researchers must be careful that their efforts to protect survivors do not send the message that survivors are incompetent. Treating survivors as overly vulnerable risks repeating abuse dynamics that cause further harm

(Violanti, 2000 as cited in Becker-Blease and Freyd, 2006).

In addition to One in Four's national reach I sought to recruit from any of the 15 RCNI affiliated Rape Crisis Centres nationally. However, this did not prove fruitful and the entire sample was recruited via One in Four. Recruitment information packs were developed (See Appendix 2-4) based on those used at McGill University and these were provided to One in Four for circulation to their clients. Due to the decision to use in-depth Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology a small sample of five adults (n=5) was sought for

the study. After discussion with One in Four the following inclusion criteria were agreed, all participants were required to be:



*Figure 24: Inclusion Criteria*

The study is concerned with adult's experiences of disclosure to social work services. It was prudent to set 19 as a lower end cut-off point for recruitment as, on occasion, 18-year olds may still be actively engaged with child protection services in respect of child protection concerns that may have arisen prior to them turning eighteen. I sought to avoid this in order that the participants would not feel restricted in any way when talking about their experiences of engaging with social work. No upper age limit was set assuming the inclusion criteria were satisfied. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the proposed interviews in addition to these inclusion criteria it was necessary to create a set of exclusion criteria so that vulnerable or potentially vulnerable adults would not be placed in a position of harm or re-traumatisation. The following exclusion criteria applied, adults excluded were those who were:

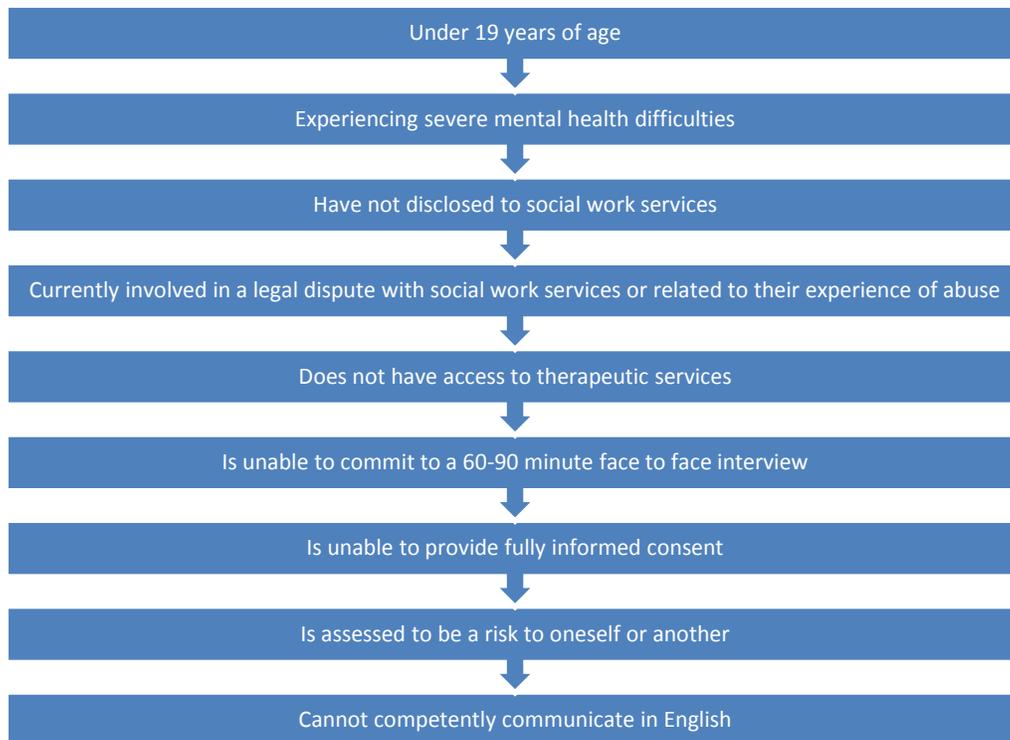


Figure 25: Exclusion Criteria

### *Description of Sample*

As mentioned, the entire sample of five adults was recruited via the organisation One in Four, who acted as gatekeepers. The sample consisted of four males (n=4) and one female (n=1) participant. The sample was somewhat atypical in respect of the wider research concerning adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. The first aspect of this was the fact that the sample was predominantly male. This may have initially been explained by One in Four's historical origins in that it was a service established by Colm O'Gorman in the UK and dealt primarily, initially at least, with adults who had experienced clerical sex abuse. Due to much of this type of abuse being perpetrated in all-male settings (industrial schools, boys primary and secondary schools) One in Four tended to have a larger proportion of male service-users than other similar services. Further to this the majority of Rape Crisis Centres

in Ireland do not offer services to males and therefore we see in One in Four's most recent annual report that their advocacy service-users are still 39% male, 61% female (One in Four, 2017, p6). However, when we look at the abuser details disclosed during the research interviews we learn that just one participant (male) was abused by a member of the clergy. This said, it is still arguable that the sample may be slightly skewed given One in Four's overall gender breakdown of service-users. There is a recent trend in disclosure scholarship to study gender as a factor in disclosure experience and such studies note a lack of attention to this issue in the past. While this research does present interesting findings in this respect, this study does not seek to directly address or provide comment on this issue due to the small sample size. Key findings of other studies are echoed here however and will be highlighted throughout the thesis where relevant.

The adults interviewed experienced abuse perpetrated by a range of abusers, reflecting the presence of child sexual abuse across social settings. The following is a breakdown of abuser-type by participant as presented in the research interviews, each participant's identity was initially coded using a number (1in4-n) and latterly using a pseudonym during the development of the Findings Chapter:

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Abuser-Type</b>	<b>Abuse Setting (general)</b>
<b>Jane (1in4-1)</b>	Teacher (Female)	School
<b>Patrick (1in4-2)</b>	Siblings (Female)	Home setting
<b>David (1in4-3)</b>	Community member and Teacher(s) (Males)	Multiple
<b>Tony (1in4-4)</b>	Extended Family Member (Male)	Multiple
<b>Paul (1in4-5)</b>	Clerical (Male)	Unknown

*Figure 26: Abuser details and Abuse Setting*

Another aspect of the atypical nature of the sample was the abuser-abusee gender context. The stereotypical portrayal is that of a male perpetrator abusing a female child. While this has been validly challenged in the literature, the adult

male-female child dynamic remains statistically predominant. However, the sample in this study varies from this statistical norm. In two instances, the perpetrators of abuse were female.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was received for this study from the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee. It is the aim of the Committee to ‘safeguard the health, welfare and rights of humans and researchers in research studies’ (Research Ethics Committee, Annual Report, 2012/2013, p1). As part of this process it was necessary to provide detail of the central research question, proposed methodology and research sample, how access and recruitment were to be conducted and any materials used to facilitate this and information about how data would be collected, stored and utilised as part of the study.

The central ethical concern of this study is the exploration of issues surrounding an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Each experience is highly individual and individual reactions cannot be fully anticipated. No questions were posed concerning specific incidences of abuse and all participants were notified of the availability of additional support from One in Four. Due to the potential risk of trauma the BNIM interviews were conducted at One in Four’s office and participants were offered follow up therapeutic services and or debriefing with a trained staff member where necessary. Participants were free to discuss their experiences of abuse if they so wished. This research design sought to reduce potential harm to the participants.

Participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they could pull out of the study or refuse to answer questions at any time. At the end of the interview the researcher provided space to discuss the interview and to allow the participant to ask any questions. The researcher reminded the participants that should they experience any heightened emotions and wish to

Speak with someone, they could contact One in Four. A follow up phone call to the participants, 7 to 10 days following the interview, was offered to allow for further questions and an opportunity to discuss the experience they had completing the interview. The follow up phone call also sought to serve as a platform to verify the participants' emotional state and to restate potential resources. No participants chose this option.

Training was also obtained in crisis suicide intervention techniques (STORM - Skills Training on Risk Management). This training provides risk management and assessment skills in relation to clients/service-users who present as suicidal. While it was not foreseen that an acute suicide risk would arise during the data collection process the author felt it was prudent to provide an extra layer of safety within the interview for each participant. In combination with his professional social work training the STORM training equipped the author to assess and manage acute presentations, conduct immediate crisis management within the interview situation before handing over to the relevant Gate Keeping organisation for further supports if needed. One such scenario arose during this research and is discussed below in the Limitations section of this chapter.

The researcher also included two sessions of personal supervision. These were included as part of the data collection and data analysis phase of the research and were used as a safety mechanism to allow space and time for the researcher to un-pack any difficult issues arising from being immersed in the material produced as part of this study. This included the interviewing of people about potentially traumatic issues, listening and re-listening to audio transcriptions of the data and thoroughly analysing said transcripts.

### Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Information packs were supplied to One in Four and potential participants could view recruitment information at their offices. All potential participants had

approximately two months to view information, contact the researcher with questions and decide whether to participate. Potential participants who accessed the research information were provided with a minimum of two weeks in which to make their decision. The researcher began data collection in March 2015 and conducted all five interviews by April 2015. Each participant was provided with a detailed Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 3 and 4) prior to agreeing to participate in the study. Written consent was obtained in the presence of the primary researcher. All participants were notified that they could withdraw this consent at any point and all participants were requested to re-consent immediately prior to the interview taking place. One in Four was made fully aware of this procedure.

All participants were aged 19 or above and were deemed by One in Four to have full capacity to commit and consent to the research project. In respect of limits of confidentiality all participants were notified prior to taking part in the study that any information that arises pertaining to a risk to current children, vulnerable persons or the participant themselves would have to be reported to the appropriate authorities under the national child protection guidelines and other relevant legislation.

Individuals who decided to participate were assigned a code number to protect their identity. Pseudonyms were later used in the presentation of the data in the thesis text. Only the primary researcher had access to the contact information identifying each participant and provision of contact information was not mandatory. This information was password protected and stored securely on a network-disabled laptop. In line with NUI Galway's Data Retention Protocol all data was anonymised and retained in a secure manner and can be held for a period of five years following the conclusion of the study. This is appropriate to meet all general NUIG auditing requirements. Data containing identifying information was securely stored and will be destroyed after use in line with the NUI Galway Data Retention Protocol. At no point was this information stored or associated with the finalised, anonymised BNIM data transcripts. Both sets

of information (transcripts and contact information) were securely stored and password protected.

## Limitations

As mentioned above BNIM is a time and resource-heavy research methodology. The operating of a BNIM analysis panel is best practice in the terms of utilisation of the full methodology. The method encourages the use of a panel to assess each transcript of data that is collected. This was however not practically or financially viable for this level of research. While this is an apparent methodological limitation the method does allow for adaptation and use of parts of the method (Wengraf, 2001; 2017). The method also emphasises non-direction and non-interruption of the research participant when sharing their narrative. One potential risk and limitation of this is that a participant may chose not to address any issues relating to the central research question being examined. This is also a potential risk in terms of the study of sensitive issues in that if a participant becomes upset or emotional it is necessary from an ethical point to assist that person, help reassure and comfort them. This entails breaking from the strict guidance of the method. This occurred in one of the interviews as part of this research and while a rich narrative was gathered from a research point of view it was necessary for the author to break from the strict use of the method and ensure the participant's wellbeing.

Alaggia warns that using a retrospective sample to examine disclosure of child sexual abuse was a constraint of her study due to the fact that 'recounting events that occurred in childhood is subject to memory failure, distortion and revision of events' (2010, p37). While this research examines disclosures of events that took place during childhood the focus is on disclosure to social work service as an adult. The lapse in time is potentially less than that in Alaggia's study. Despite this however, it is a general limitation that relying on a retrospective account does introduce personal interpretations and recollection of

events perhaps following therapeutic intervention or legal advice. This research focuses on presenting individual voice and experience and while not considered a limitation of the study as such, it is prudent to note this feature or retrospective accounts.

Gagnier and Collin-Vézina (2016), conducting a similar study of the experiences of male survivors of child sexual abuse, note that a limitation of their research was that it ‘follows in the path of qualitative research tradition in which smaller samples are used to better understand issues and dynamics, which may allow further research to eventually be pursued on the same topic, on a larger scale’ (2016, p237). Likewise, this research while not seeking to be generalisable is subject to similar limitation in terms of sample size.

Due to ethical requirements, a purposefully sampled population with access to therapeutic resources and safeguards was selected for this study. As mentioned, this sample had a specific skill set to discuss not only their experiences of abuse but also their experiences of disclosure and engage in recall and meaning making with regards to both. The data produced, while extremely valuable and instructive, must be viewed with this limitation in mind. Gagnier and Collin-Vézina (2016) citing Dorahy and Clearwater (2012), noted similar limitation in their study stating that ‘individuals who receive help while participating in a study might be inclined to share their experience with disclosure more willingly than those who have never received services (2016, p237). In fact, Sarsoli, Kia-Keating and Grossman (2008) note that ‘it may be that participants who were less likely to volunteer had even more difficulties with or concerns about disclosing their histories’ (2008, p342).

## Summary

This chapter reiterated the central research question and aims of this research. It explained how where the study sits in the wider field of social work research and described the process of design including planning trips to the United States and Canada to learn from key world experts in the field. This is followed by an explanation of the chosen methodology and rationale for its specific use in this research. The two strands of data analysis, BNIM Panel analysis and thematic analysis, are also explained. Ethical considerations are then considered and detailed. Finally, the presentation of the data via an ecological framework is discussed. The following chapter presents the substantive findings of the research via this ecological lens.

## Chapter Six: Findings

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the research following analysis of BNIM interviews conducted with five adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and their experiences of disclosing to social work services. In keeping with the theoretical framework discussed previously, as the chapter progresses reference will be made to where each theme sits within Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. The placement of each subtheme within these layers of the model is a result of the researcher's analysis and perspective. It should be noted that this is not a deterministic or definitive process but instead seeks to best explain the data from an ecological perspective while being cognisant that many themes can relate to many levels of the model. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the main themes, including data relating to 'The Adult', 'Disclosure', 'Interaction', 'Information', 'Social Work' and 'Reflection'.

Retaining a narrative perspective, each of the main themes will open with a vignette. This will be a piece that is representative of the overall theme and will provide the reader with a context of what is to follow. This will be followed by the substantive data relating to that theme and its subthemes followed by a summary. The chapter will conclude with a selection of Particular Incident Narratives, which are longer, more detailed excerpts that have been chosen as being representative of individual's experiences.

### Overview of the Main themes

The first theme is '*The Adult*'. It presents a picture of the adult's experiences and how they have come to disclose to social work services. The findings

emphasise that there are many facets that shape the adult who comes forward to social work services. As much as there are many features which shape the course of human development in general there are specific features of an adult who has experienced abuse which the findings present as significant. Once we have established a picture of the adult coming forward the chapter then presents findings relating to *'The Disclosure'*. The adult's experiences of this process are presented and various influences are also highlighted as they occur throughout the adult's ecological system i.e. macro influences, chronological influences etc. Following this, findings in respect of the *'Interaction'* between social worker and adult will be presented. The next section focuses on the *'Information'* received, withheld or unavailable to the adult for various reasons and the effect this has on such an adult. Finally, findings will be presented in respect of the *'Social Work'* system, and the adults' *'Reflections'* on this, the social work process and wider macro influences.

*(Note: Each ellipsis can be read as a one second pause.)*

## The Adult

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*People... ya know... some people don't even realise... what way sexual abuse effects them like ya know, the way they are, their personality like ya know. So, I just think that there should be basic consideration to, at least try to imagine ... how ... that person is feeling coming to meet you... Are they nervous, are they anxious, ...we'll rent a room we'll go in there like ya know in complete confidentiality, make em feel safe and secure and we'll respect it. You know I think respect is a massive ... it's a massive word and I didn't feel like I was given any respect by the HSE in my experience with them ...*

*Paul*

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This theme presents examples of the issues that affect those impacted by childhood abuse. Subthemes in the micro-system included 'co-morbidities' such as substance misuse and mental health, details of the abuse experienced by the participants, and examples of personal resilience. Three further subthemes were identified which broadly mapped on to the adults' meso-system relating to the impact of abuse, coping strategies and family dynamics. While the final subtheme of gender is viewed as relating to macro-system or wider societal factors while acknowledging its ultimate impact on a personal level.

### *Co-morbidity*

This relates to issues affecting the adult either as a direct result of their experience of abuse or co-morbid to this experience. Many of the participants spoke about other issues affecting their lives, many of these they related directly to the abuse that they experienced in childhood, others believed these issues to be unrelated or were not quite sure. We know from research that child

sexual abuse can affect people in many ways over their life course and Patrick sums up this feature when he discusses his own experience of suicidal ideation and believing all the issues that affected him are related somehow:

*...there was a time, I'm not now, I was a suicide risk... not necessarily just to do with this [the abuse], to do with the addiction, everything, depression it was all rolled together...*

*Patrick*

As described in the sample characteristics above, Patrick experienced abuse at the hands of both of his older sisters. He goes on to describe how the other issues affecting him interrelate with his sense of trust and ultimately the effect of having experienced childhood sexual abuse:

*...and I then of course because of all this and because of the addiction and the depression and all that, I kinda built up sort of, you know, conspiracy theories and that, you know, as one might with all that, ... if you can't trust your two big sisters, what's the rest of the world going to be like...*

*Patrick*

Tony describes how such 'co-morbidities' were an influence on him coming forward to disclose his experience of abuse:

*...my road down the whole reporting began in ahm ... probably about [year] ... ahm ... when I began going off the rails if you like, my personal life, drug abuse, alcohol abuse ahm ... which in itself led in to a confrontation with my perpetrator...*

*Tony*

Patrick again here describes how the abusive experience has such an effect on his life and tries to rationalise why he thinks in a certain way:

*... why am I thinking like this, why am I so paranoid, because the whole thing is based on somebody pushing and just doing what they want, they whole thing, everything is about this,*

*Patrick*

### *Abusive Experience*

An obvious feature that effects the adults who ultimately come forward to disclose their abuse to social work services is the abusive experience or experiences themselves. In this piece, Patrick describes how he began to experience abuse and the dynamics of an abusive experience:

*...that's the way it went for me, a little bit here and little there, a little bit of a boundary here and then the physical stuff, you can actually go black and white, this was sexually abuse that happened and then the psychological stuff and then the shaming and all the, you know, sneering and all that was throughout...*

*Patrick*

Tony describes how the lead up and aftermath of the abuse can be as significant as the abusive experience itself and has an ability to shape and alter the social spheres and relationships around the individual:

*Ya know, as they said themselves they were groomed and they were manipulated. ... that's what he did and he continued to do that, for years and years and years. Like the sexual abuse is difficult, it is difficult ... because of the memories you have but ... the grooming and the verbal and the, ya know, manipulation of people, particularly my own family, was the hardest, it's hard to deal with.*

*Tony*

## *Resilience*

Despite the experiences of abuse and the possibly related or concurrent effects, a sub-theme was also identified which can be related to a sense of resilience, conscious or unconscious, within the adult. Jane, speaking about her interaction with social work during the disclosure process, highlighting a strength that allowed her to handle a certain amount of the social work process to be out of her hands:

*Ah so... I am big enough and mature enough and experienced enough to realise that you can't be involved in every stage of the process and you don't get the right to be in the detail and to be privy to that because... it needs to run its own course and people have to be proven guilty etcetera, and I am fully on board with that.*

*Jane*

In a more specific and nuanced way Patrick highlights his awareness of the process he had entered and reflects on what it might be like for someone less educated than himself. Again, highlighting a sense of resilience on his part to deal with the process:

*Ahm and I'm ok cause I can read these things, you know god forbid, I know it sounds condescending, but god forbid someone who hasn't got the education I have and can't read. I can actually go online find it and I can find a place where someone has discussed it and I can see the implication of that and track up stuff and not only do that on line, I can do that thought specialised libraries if I want*

*Patrick*

Like Patrick above, Paul here again presents a sense of his ability to 'deal with' the negative aspects of his process of disclosure but reflects on his concerns for

others who may not be so resilient. In the second quote from Paul he does however highlight that he did not always have this capacity:

*This is my thinking like, I can get over myself being treated like that, I'm a big boy, I'm thick skinned or whatever like ya know. As much as it shouldn't be tolerated like, unfortunately it's the country we live in at least like a lot of things aren't done properly but like I will give my statement to the HSE*

*like I'm old enough now to take the steps to deal with this like through counselling through One in Four through whatever but for long enough I wasn't like,*

*Paul*

### *Impact of abuse*

Within the meso-system, data in respect of the impact of abuse related how the effects of abuse may influence the adults experience of interaction with others, especially, for this research, their interaction with social work services. Jane begins this subtheme reflecting on how control was a feature of her abuse and how this was replicated in her engagement with social work:

*... like I have been in a situation where I was controlled for twelve years so that was a major trigger for, for me as a victim. And .... Just suddenly then being in front of, I'm sorry did you say you're a child protector, and now you're going to try and exercise this ridiculous level of control and hoodwinking over me*

*Jane*

David explains the devastating impact of not just the abusive experience but how it changed his daily life. He goes on, in the second quotation to state how the abuse affected other facets of his life such as his educational attainment

highlighting not just the established ‘direct effects’ of abuse but also how it impacts on an individual’s broader life course:

*I was just trapped in this thing where my mother was sending me up all the time to him[abuser] and, and there was no way I could, at night, I’d go to bed at night, I’d pray, pray that I wouldn’t wake up in the morning (upset) and when I’d wake up in the morning I was angry with god, just ya know, really genuinely just angry for ... for waking up*

*after I got abused my mother kept me at home for a few weeks or whatever but when I went back all the others were doing joined writing ... and he [teacher] ... I’m not going back for you for one person to teach, so my writing was like, and that was, I just worked me way to the back of the class and stayed there until sixteen or seventeen years of age and that was it so just... .. that’s the effect ....*

*David*

### *Coping Strategies*

The participants also shared some information in respect of how they attempted to deal with the experience they had as children and, although not specifically referenced as such, ways of coping with the effects of abuse:

*I started building myself up, making meself in to a bigger fella ya, maybe it was a protection thing to ward people away, but it didn’t really go away from me.*

*Tony*

Ultimately, Tony goes on to discuss how due to the experience of abuse and the family dynamics at play in that his abuser was his uncle and ‘like a brother’ to him, he moved from his local area to seek a fresh start:

*I invested in property and I moved out of... .. and ... .. it was probably the best thing I ever did. I was close enough away, I was forty minutes away but it was far enough away at the same time. I had a fresh start, new people, nobody knew me, new town. New pubs. Ya know. My wife had a circle of friends*

*Tony*

### *Family Dynamics*

One of the prominent sub-themes identified in this section relates to family dynamics, how they influence the adult, their ability to disclose and their effect upon the adult's environment following disclosure. Patrick is representative of this theme where he discusses his difficulty in disclosing due to the close relationship with his abusers:

*one of the reasons I didn't come forward with this information was because of who they are... they weren't random strangers on the street... d'you know what I mean and ahh... obviously you might theoretically, out of a book, have some idea about ah... complexity issues and all that but ahm.... The lived reality is really really difficult ahm...ah cause there's so many mixed messages and there's so much messed up stuff going on,*

*Patrick*

Patrick goes on to speak about the intersection of 'normal' family dynamics and how they can also impact on the experience of disclosure and the adult's experiences following abuse. Here Patrick is reflecting on whether or not his sisters, who had abused him as a child and whom he has now reported to social work services, have been informed of this report and if they have in turn spoken to his mother about the matter:

*I'm not even sure they've told my mom, they've told her something, but I'm not sure what ...ahm ... and nothing has actually been brought out in to the open and all that because... as it would happen ma is actually suffering from a heart condition at the moment and I'm not getting in to pushing that right now, d'you know what I mean, but... am there's layers of all that going on as well ...*

*Patrick*

David again highlights the adults' family background and, in comparison to the abusive experience, the 'everyday' issues that he needs to contend with. David speaks about trying to prioritise caring for his elderly father ahead of dealing with his own experiences of abuse. He describes having a sense of not knowing what would happen once he begins to address his own past:

*I was under so much pressure, my father with the Alzheimer's and he was doubly incontinent and no help from my sister or brother or no, I was just totally on my own but I had to ... .. you know I got my father in hospital and it was when I got him in to the home then, I said now it's my time now, so that was it, so I couldn't, I held on, cause I was afraid if I opened up I didn't know what would happen me, if I'd just totally ... collapse with it, I just had no idea what would happen ...*

*David*

Tony provides an insight in to how his wider family proposed to deal with the abuse he had experienced. Presenting the significance of family dynamics and responses and reactions to disclosure, Tony speaks here about what happened when he told his Uncle about the abuse:

*And I basically told him what had happened ... and he was of the opinion that he could sort it out with the perpetrator who was his brother. And I met them the next morning and they proceeded to sweep it under the carpet. Ahm ... .. there was a proposal made with money ... .. which I didn't accept,*

*Tony*

Tony goes on to provide an account of how his disclosure ultimately effected his wider family, this had a significant impact on Tony as he describes in the second quotation the close relationship he had to his abuser and by association, his wider social structure:

*... I told them [parents] and ah, there was a huge fall out... split in the family ... divide ... nobody took ... my father's side, all his brothers and sisters took the side of the perpetrator ah ... so there was a big fall out ... both my father's parents ... were dead... ah ... and I felt, to be really honest, my grandmother knew about it anyway ... she actually sent this guy away for, to Australia, borrowed the money from the Credit Union and sent him away and told him to never come back. That's what my father told me, but he arrived back two years later.*

*You see the unfortunate thing for me was, when I was growing up my perpetrator was only ten years older than me ... so ... he was my father's youngest brother, see, I had no brothers, I had two sisters, so he was like a brother to me and ... his social circle of friends became my social circle of friends, ... ahm ... so there was a lot of fallout, there was a huge fallout ahm*

*Tony*

Paul's statement below highlights the significance of disclosure within this mesosystem or system of interactions between the individual's tighter social structures. Paul, referring to his disclosure to social work, shares his concern as to how the assessment will be managed and who will be contacted since he had not discussed the abuse with his family:

*...so, I don't want to think that people are discussing things about me that happened me when my family, my mother, my sisters, my brothers aren't aware ya know.*

*Paul*

## *Gender*

Findings were identified in respect of the adult's sense of gender or issues which arose in respect of their gender or gender identity. These are viewed as macro or societal issues that impact upon the individual. Two of the adults who took part in the study were abused by females. One of these participants is female (Jane) and the other is male (Patrick). Being male, Patrick provides a detailed description of how this gender dynamic impacted upon him but also how it affected his interaction with two female social workers when he came forward to disclose his abuse to the child protection services:

*we had two people... named, ah both my sisters (short laugh)  
ah ...which is one of the things that had held me back for  
ages because I was male and them being female as opposed  
to the inverse.... You know all... all the other combinations  
that we hear in the media and press and that.... ... Ahm...*

*Patrick*

Patrick goes on to describe the family environment that he grew up with being predominantly female and in the final quote from him how this all manifested in his meeting with social work services:

*so, there was my two sisters there my mam and me, so sort a  
women's coven almost for years...*

*at the same time, other than [advocacy worker] I was the only  
bloke in this room, you know I was just lucky that [advocacy  
worker] was male, do you know what I mean, and I was*

*going, and here's me know agh getting a bit heated about these women and all that setting meself up and kind of going hold on, what is going on here, do you know what I mean and I was going, I was just conscious if the roles had been reversed ahm...*

*Patrick*

As a corollary to Patrick's account and highlighting the individual nature of the effects of abuse, David shares his account that the social workers being female was in fact a source of comfort to him, initially describing his male abuser as big and strong and domineering:

*When I went there, there was two, they just seemed like two little girls to me which was really good for me cause I didn't feel intimidated or that*

*David*

The findings in respect of gender also echo the literature in respect of the effects of childhood sexual abuse on gender and sexual identity. As discussed in the literature chapter many studies have highlighted, predominantly male, experiences of sexual identity issues following an experience of abuse. Tony is representative of this experience when he shares the following piece:

*you come to adolescence then and puberty, you don't know what to think ... .. am I gay... .. you're in the yard and you get a horn, you're playing with a load of lads playing football, am I gay? because of a result of what happened to me, cause I'm a victim of sexual abuse. You become a victim again. ... you're a victim of your own mind, do you know what I mean. Am I gay? ... .. I don't know, but you stick within a circle of men, you stick within a circle of women.*

*Tony*

## Disclosure

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*Consider that those, the people you're going to meet are probably all that week leading up to it thinking about it, going through it, re-living what's happened to them, ya know, going back to a place where they don't necessarily want to be, want to visit, like ya know. All these things like that have to be taken in to account.*

*Paul*

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Having presented the background and experiences of the adults coming forward to disclose, this section will present the findings in respect of the disclosure to social work services. Again, the findings are presented as they relate to the ecological model cognisance being paid to the fact that such layers are interrelated and not fixed or finite. Within the adult's microsystem findings were identified relating to issues regarding the adult 'Trying to Tell' and their perceived and stated, 'Reasons for Disclosure'. Barriers and facilitators, as experienced by the adults, are also presented here along with their pathways to disclosure, the facets of disclosure and the societal aspects of disclosing childhood sexual abuse.

### *Trying to tell*

As discussed in the literature review chapter, it is well established that many individuals effected by childhood sexual abuse do not come forward and disclose until adulthood and potentially a larger proportion do not disclose at all. While this study focusses on the adults' disclosures to social work services, it is important to highlight that the participants may have disclosed or attempted to disclose previously in their lives. The following data relates to the

participants attempts to disclose or being presented with opportunities where a disclosure was sought. The opening quote in this sub-theme from Tony demonstrates the difficulty in disclosing an experience of abuse even when presented with a direct question about it. In this piece Tony is describing an incident whereby he was hospitalised due to an attempted suicide:

*at that stage I was asked my reasons for my attempted suicide  
ahm. .... But I told them there was no reasons and it was  
alcohol and drug fuelled. Which I had a lot, I had a lot of  
ecstasy and alcohol in my system. So, I became very  
withdrawn and I went to GP and again I was asked was I  
sexually abused and I denied it and he basically told me I was  
an alcoholic and I was dependant on drugs*

*Tony*

The following narrative provided by David paints a significant picture of the behavioural attempts to tell and the powerful silencing nature of child sexual abuse. David was abused by a teacher who was providing grinds in his personal home. As this abuse was on going, David became aware that his abuser's partner was in fact one of his school teachers. In the following quotes, David presents a picture of the difficulty in making a disclosure and telling someone about abuse and the often power-imbued dynamics that come in to play between relationships:

*She came home one time before this and caught, a few weeks  
before this, and caught us in bed together, and she came in  
and 'what's going on here' she said and ah... he jumped up  
or whatever and he started hitting her ... .. so from ... ..  
... she, ... she ... once ... she was in, once, I went in to the  
class room then again and I wouldn't stop staring at her and  
I would let go of her, because I knew then, she knew what was  
going on exactly so I wouldn't let go, I was going 'I've got  
the power here' ... and I wouldn't stop staring at her and she  
was staring at me and she came down and hit me in the class  
loads, plenty of times and I wouldn't let go of it. I would say  
'your hits are not like his hits at all', and I'm still going to do  
it, I kept staring and I really just, I wouldn't let go. ...*

*David*

Paul shared his attempts to tell, again presenting the difficult nature of telling or disclosing. In the second piece from Paul below, he highlights a feature, well established by the research, that a majority of those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse do not come forward until adulthood:

*...I couldn't find the courage like, I threatened it long, many times like ya know that I'd go forward and just contact someone and just let them know that it's confidential like ya know just do it in some way that he's out of harm's way, but I didn't like.*

*my age is a very young age to come forward like ya know and some people don't come forward till they're in their sixties, their seventies, their eighties and all.*

*Paul*

### *Reasons for disclosure*

The participants in the study shared numerous reasons for their disclosure, not just their disclosure to social work services. Some of these early experiences of disclosure did however tend to start a process which ultimately led to disclosing to social work services. One of the prominent findings within this theme supports anecdotal evidence which suggests that one of the main drivers for adults deciding to disclose stems from a sense of wishing to protect other children. This feature is reflected in these data. We also see the continuing dynamics relating to family, effects of abuse and issues regarding sexuality and fears of becoming an abuser. The opening quote by Jane emphasises the family dynamics at play and the power within the family relationship that lead to the disclosure being a family decision:

*it was a natural course of action for them to want to take in terms of protecting me and wanting to understand what the hell they were dealing with*

*Jane*

Jane's initial disclosure was made to a psychiatrist, prompted and supported by her family, however her rationale for disclosing to child protection services is evident here and supports the above contention of awareness of a child protection obligation:

*I had an overarching feeling of knowing that that person was still in employment, so I knew for a fact, I knew all sorts of things for a fact. So, I did kind of feel that this is wrong and I do need to play my part*

*honestly my hope, my motivation to participate in the HSE process was purely to try, if I could, to help other people*

*Jane*

Paul also shared this sense of duty to ensure other children were protected and cited this as a substantial reason for his decision to disclose:

*my primary concern was to make sure... that there was every ... every possible mechanism in place to stop the individual from ... further ... you know abusing, you know sexually abusing other children 'cause he was still practicing and he's not anymore which ... you know is some bit of ... ahm relief to me or comfort ... but ahm ...*

*Paul*

Another commonly described anecdotal feature of disclosure is where adults are triggered to disclose following the birth of their own children. This is supported

and echoed here by Patrick, he also highlights a need to move beyond dealing with the ‘symptoms’ of the abuse:

*...one of the things that triggered me was ah... I became a father two years ago, two and half years almost to the day, ... and... That brought a load of stuff up... ah for me and I said I have to get my act together ... or at least start really dealing with the, not dealing with the symptoms but dealing with the stuff... ahm...*

*Patrick*

Patrick also raised an interesting issue when he shared his concerns that he felt he could possibly go on to abuse his own son due to his experience of abuse. While this cyclical nature of abuse is not supported in the research, it is a genuine concern shared here by Patrick and his friend and is a further driving factor for Patrick’s disclosure. In addition to this Patrick also shares his ‘child protection’ concerns in respect of his nieces and nephews, being the sons and daughters of his abusers:

*I was talking to one of my friends from fellowship ah, I’m in ah [support programme name], .... And ahm.... He had some similar experiences and it was one of the things when we heard, .... Ahm... I was going to be a dad, it was really strange cause I actually had a conversation with a fellow of the same age and the two of us saying ‘do you think you will do the same and blah blah blah, d’you know what I mean do you think cause of the whole cycle thing and that.... And it was one of those things where I said no I better actually really face all of this off finally and not just deal with say the sex addiction or deal with sort of other issues that I’d had*

*that was to me the thing that actually worried me the most about my nephews and nieces, .... The environment they’re currently in*

*Patrick*

## *Barriers*

Within the adults' meso-systems various barriers were presented. Here Jane speaks about how the lack of clarity, as to what will happen once she discloses, acted as a barrier in respect of her engagement with social work. Although this created a sense of apprehension, Jane ultimately did disclose to, and engage with, social work services.

*what does that look like what does it mean, what does it mean  
if I say something to them, are they going to go off and tell  
the guards, what if I don't want the guards to know, oh shit,  
the guards, I never thought about them.*

*Jane*

Once engaged with the actual process of disclosure to social work services Jane experienced further barriers. In this piece, Jane states how, following her initial disclosure to social work services, the seeking of extra information by the social workers acted as a barrier:

*It kind of felt like a barrier that was like... "well, you know  
not much more we can do if we don't have more detail"  
...and I was like well honestly, I don't even know if I could....  
I wouldn't be able to just go on recall right now about it*

*Jane*

Patrick again echoing the power of family dynamics and the potential silencing effect of abuse states how his fear of disrupting his whole family was a significant barrier to him initially disclosing to social work. This is also echoed by Tony in the subsequent quote:

*but feeling that responsibility of, I could be fucking it all up,  
and that's one of the reasons nothing came out, don't fuck it  
all up, you know, don't mess it all up, the whole family thing.*

*Patrick*

*I supposed I was fearful what was going to happen ya know,  
for my family and primarily for myself, but mostly for my  
family, my mother and father, and me sister and what the fall  
out would be ... ahm ...*

*Tony*

David shared his concerns in respect of the number of social workers that would be meeting with him and how this might have been a barrier or created apprehension for him. Here he describes how he felt about potentially being interviewed by two or even three social workers:

*So, two, I would have said to [Therapist] that like I was ...  
very worried that I would freeze if I had two, like I did here a  
few times, very worried about it, but if it was two or three,  
like I'm not used to it,*

*David*

### *Facilitators*

The participants did also share some features and occurrences that they perceived as helpful, supportive or as facilitating their disclosure to social work services. Patrick discusses how his sense of the role and authority of social work served as a comfort and reassurance to him. He describes his initial belief that the social work office could act as a 'buffer' between him and his abusers and that this contributed to facilitating his disclosure:

*... I said, hold on, if there's an outside agency, there's an  
intermediary there that someone has to explain themselves to  
and I have a buffer and its, its live and real as opposed to I  
said this and just get shouted down and just get ate...*

*Patrick*

Prior to the engagement with social work services Patrick also discussed how being able to talk openly and honestly with a friend about his experiences was a significant facilitator to later disclosing to social work:

*while you're not going in to absolute details and naming names and stuff you can talk about things in a very... sort of flat... manner and ... I was saying Jesus like we were sitting there on the seats in front of the [place name] going Jesus, what have you thought about this have you thought about that and ..just throwing it back and forth for about forty five minutes going that's actually great that I can actually be open to another human being without them going what the fuck is wrong with you, you know this is concern of mine, I don't want to, you know, I don't know cause my lines and boundaries are so all over the place what is right and what's wrong and blah blah blah,*

*Patrick*

*Pathways to disclosure*

While we can see that the participants presented a range of facilitators and barriers to making their disclosure, they also provided data which related to their pathway to engaging with social work services. We can see from the findings below that, while these pathways were experienced in the meso system there is a significant influence of child protection and reporting policy at play in the statements below; again, highlighting the interrelationships between the participant's socio-ecological spheres. In this opening quote, Jane, describing a meeting with her psychiatrist following her experience of abuse, discusses how she came to embark on the path towards 'official' disclosure to social work:

*... she turned around to me and said you know [Jane] I have ahm, .... I have a duty of care and a legal obligation to report*

*this to the HSE, and I was like ahhhh, its three hours later do you think you might have fucking mentioned this at the top of the meeting (laughed)...*

*...because this is very stressful to feel like you've just disclosed this, you're sitting in front of a psychiatrist, you still don't know what your diagnosis and outlook is.... And yet I have to do this. So ... I felt sorry for her, but I equally felt kind of really ... I felt like I had been a bit had*

*Jane*

Also in a therapeutic setting, Tony describes how, the wider societal and policy obligation to report, played a significant part in his initial engagement with social work services:

*she [therapist] was of the opinion because of the legislation or something at the time, the new child welfare, there was a new legislation passed that it would be in my best interests to make a report to the HSE ...*

*Tony*

### *Societal Attitudes*

Issues relating to societal attitudes are presented in respect of the adult's macrosystems. Many participants spoke about the wider child protection system and their awareness of an obligation to report relevant information to the appropriate child protection services. Jane described this system of reporting as laid down by the guidelines and how it interplayed with her disclosure to a psychiatrist:

*And she said, I remember her having some kind of a form, she had like some kind of a form, an official kind of form. And she said, you know, I have to fill out, there's all this new legislation or policy or something in place and she said it's my, it's part of my duty of care and my, my oath that I've*

*taken as a psychiatrist to, to inform the HSE in child protection around the fact that there is, that A this happened and B it happened where it happened when it happened but also that that person is still on the staff which is a very significant problem,*

*So.... She did say, as well, that she needed to speak to one of her colleagues because she had never done this herself, in terms of, because there was some, so this was like 2011, so there was some new... legislation or maybe there was a formal warning that had come through from the HSE that said, anyone fucking comes across anyone you're to do A, B and C, so there was a very kind of strong, she was like I really have, I, my hands are tied like I have to do this, this isn't up to me this is something I have to do*

*Jane*

## Interaction

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*I think it comes down, fundamentally, to the way that it's communicated.... Ahm... like the only reason people feel controlled.... Or where you can exert control is if and when you withhold information from them.*

*Jane*

---

This theme relates predominantly to the social worker and adult interaction surrounding the adult's disclosure. Subthemes here include perceived supports, how the process interacted with the adults' 'day-to-day' life, issues regarding control, delay and belief. Two other sub themes arose related to the environment in which the interview took place and the language used by the social worker.

### *Experience of the Interaction*

David opens this piece by sharing his feelings around what it was like for him when he engaged with the social work department to disclose. In a second related quote David reflects upon and confirms his feeling:

*Well it's a little bit yeah, its ... it's a little bit unfeeling kind of thing, a little cold, kind of thing. You don't have the, you know but then maybe I was just feeling the pressure the other side of it.*

*A bit cold yeah, a bit cold.*

*David*

This sentiment about the contact with social work services is echoed and similar terms are used by Jane to describe the initial letter that she received from the social work service. This was a letter she received after initially notifying the child protection office that she had been sexually abused as a child:

*So, I got this letter and I didn't, it was very short and it was very...am, we have received information and we would like to speak to you. So, it was very officious, it was ah... it wasn't very comfortable to receive in the sense that.... It was just very officious, it was very cold,*

*Jane*

Patrick also shared some general sentiments about his contact with social work services, stating that his initial experience was positive and that the start of the process provided him with support:

*the start of the process was really good ah, I felt very, well supported here and I thought the HSE behaved really well they were professional about it... they, they said all the right things*

*Patrick*

Tony described predominantly negative feelings regarding his first contact with social work services largely because his initial meeting was cancelled. This was compounded with no follow up by the social worker and then a delay in any feedback:

*well the first thing about it was ... the level of professionalism wasn't there, ya know, arranged the meeting and then didn't turn up for the meeting, but then no phone call until after the fact ... then a second meeting they took a statement I gave great detail and it took them six weeks to come back, with anything. And then they actually in fact come back with*

*nothing ... .. didn't help me out... like something as serious  
as that ...*

*Tony*

Paul also experienced a cancellation of his initial meeting with social work and as we will see, while he initially brushed it off, he ultimately shares his sense of frustration echoing Tony's experience above. Paul also highlights his expectation that the fact that he was coming forward to disclose sexual abuse and the impact that that may have should have been considered. The sense of not being prioritised, in the later quote, runs through the experiences of all participants and will be discussed in more detail in a later section. Paul begins here talking about his reaction to the cancellation:

*I would like to think that if I was in that job I would think that  
this is a massive thing for this person what they're doing and  
you know it needs to be given due care and ya know respect  
that it deserves like and you going to be seen to be doing that  
and make that person feel somewhat at ease but ahm ... ..  
yeah so ... the cancellation, I was taken aback by it and ... ..  
... I did kind of ah, Jesus ... I would have thought that this  
would have been a priority like*

*Paul*

### *Supports*

The participants shared information in respect of the various forms of support that they experienced in respect of the entire disclosure process, not specifically the disclosure to social work. Jane attributed most of this support to her connection with her therapeutic organisation but specifically highlighted a meeting with a Garda Superintendent which helped clarify the role of the child protection system for her and put her at some ease:

*So thankfully he [superintendent] was able to bring me through ok, here's what they can do and here's what they can't do, here's how we get involved with the police here's when we will absolutely not get involved with the police, here's what would happen if we did rock up to such and such a school or such and such a person's house...So that was amazing, and that was the first night I had slept in weeks after I met him because I was like oh thank god, because he allowed me to understand.... He was just amazing, he was just like, this is how it goes, and it's really shit, and it's not really in your favour as a victim and, it's not a good system, but this is how it works and this is where you do have control and this is where you don't have control*

*Jane*

In addition to his supportive friend with whom he had discussed his experiences of abuse, Patrick also referenced his beliefs about the social work process to be a support in initially going forward to disclose. He spoke about having disclosed previously to other professionals such as counsellors but felt that his disclosure to social work would be different in that they would be able to act on the information:

*Til then I had only actually told the sort of reality... to say two counsellors, therapists and this was sort of people outside the real world... who could get real names and real addresses and could google them both and do you know... d'you know what I mean, things like this, it was suddenly a big step and it was a big weight off me ... (cough)... my shoulders and that*

*Patrick*

While not mentioning any specific supportive factors in respect of the disclosure process or the meeting with social work, David did share his experiences of having someone who he felt was a support at the time at which he was experiencing the abuse. During the interview David identified a teacher with whom he had a good rapport and, in the author's view from the narrative

he shared, was someone who seemed to epitomise that ‘one good adult’ that every child deserves. While David was never able to tell this teacher of the abuse he was experiencing, he shared the following story about his final days in her class which hints at the support he experienced from this teacher and the often ‘behavioural’ nature of trying to tell:

*... she kind of brought me out of myself or whatever, ya know.*

*... but she ... she was brilliant with me you know I remember my mother and she [the teacher] was leaving and my mother was like get her a box [of chocolates], and I was ‘no, I just want to get her an apple, a red apple’ ... and I just ... knew I was giving her my heart, you know that kind of a way, and my mother was apologising to the teacher for the apple saying, ‘you know, it just had to be an apple’.*

*David*

Again, outside the realm of the disclosure and the interaction with the social work services, Tony shared information regarding the level of support he received following the conviction of his abuser in the courts:

*I got support from people I’ve never got support from, they rang me up, they rang me parents up, they sent cards to me mother’s house, I got letters of apology from people, I got phone calls of apologies from people, who down through the years just didn’t believe me.*

*Tony*

### *Intersection with Day-to-Day Life*

It has been discussed in this thesis that disclosure is not a static, isolated event and instead occurs within an ever-changing socio-ecological environment surrounding the adult. While a disclosure of childhood sexual abuse is most definitely an extremely significant part of the participants’ lives, this sub-theme

relates to data shared by the participants' where they discuss impacts upon their lives outside of the disclosure process and unrelated to their experiences of abuse. Jane shared her story of how the process of attending the social work offices and making her disclosure was impacting upon her working life:

*It was really frustrating cause I had to take time off work  
I just thought, I came out here this morning and lied about my  
dental appointment to my boss  
So am... And you know nine o'clock meetings out where it was  
weren't suiting me for work and all that kind of stuff so it's  
quite a lot of work and then you know the other consideration  
is that it's hard to go through a meeting like that and then  
turn around and go to work*

*Jane*

Following his disclosure to social work services Patrick was informed that letters would be sent out to both of his sisters to inform them that an allegation of abuse had been made against them and they would be invited in to a social work interview. Patrick describes how he was seeking information in relation to when these letters would be sent out due to a forthcoming family birthday party for his mother at which his sisters would most likely be in attendance. His statement is a stark example of how family dynamics and the explosive nature of a disclosure of sexual abuse can impact upon everyday family life:

*I rang them up to say did they [the letters] go out... because  
as chance would have it ... it was my mother's eightieth  
birthday in the same week ... and I was going like... am I  
going in to a cage fight, what am I going in to, what is going  
to happen here...*

*Patrick*

Patrick also discusses how all of this was occurring while his life was in an extremely busy time. He and his partner were expecting a new baby and he was finishing his PhD and the pressures that go along with these elements:

*cause like the stress was the HSE 'cause it was coming along, illusions to [son] ...ahm... finishing the PhD... ah... my wife being bananas as pregnant women are in the last few months (laugh) and so all that was coming together and one of the outlets was ... I actually have to focus on some of this stuff cause I don't want this coming up in five or six years' time ...*

*you're keeping all this stuff in your head and you're trying to write ah even if it's only twelve thousand words or something, you do keep an awful lot of narratives and all in your head and that doesn't, if a phone call comes and you get a half message and this other thing creeps up and you're going, where do I stand and there's this other family event coming up that you're going, I don't want to be around.*

*Patrick*

Paul describes a very direct link with his life outside his disclosure to social work in that one of the two social workers who was meeting with him was from his local home area. As mentioned above Paul had not disclosed to his family and this was a significant dynamic for him within the interview with social work. Paul later reflected upon whether this should have been appreciated by social workers and accommodated in a different way:

*she brought someone who I'm sure she was aware of ... that worked in [Paul's home town] ya know, so I thought that was a bit, that was very insensitive like ya know and as, I don't know guidelines but you think you'd have checks in place to say look this is who were meeting, a young fella from [place name] like you know, maybe it's not a good idea for you to be here like if you know people from [place name] ...I was kind of like saying if she is still in contact with people that know my family that I grew up with if she still socialises with people cause some of the people she mentioned ... still live in [place name] and you know and they're uncles of people that*

*I grew up with, played [sport] with ...And especially as my family weren't aware ya know.*

*Paul*

### *Control*

The element of control featured across the narratives provided by each participant. Findings related to the level of control that the participants felt was being exerted over them and findings in respect of the level of control they felt they could retain and utilise. Before beginning his engagement with the social work process Paul wanted to ensure that he was in the right 'place' to notify the then HSE, demonstrating his own level of control over the situation:

*And then as I got more ya know ... as I got more confident dealing with it myself like ya know, through counselling and stuff like that, I ... kind of in a place where I wanted to then notify the HSE, for myself and for, anyone who was in danger, for my own piece of mind that I was doing anything that I could do to protect other children and to take him out of harm's way...*

*Paul*

Jane expressed her own concerns about her control over the information she was going to share and how this might impact upon a parallel legal process that she had already initiated and how the disclosure to social work somewhat forced her hand in relation to this. She also expressed sentiments as to how she was going to exert her own control over her meetings with social workers and what she wished to gain from those meetings:

*I was like what if I say stuff to them and they go off and do whatever they do and that compromises what I've started but really .....the HSE process ..... played such a huge role in me ..... Making a decision as to whether I was going to, because if they were going to blow my cover then I*

*was gonna blow it first. Cause I did not want them to take control over what my life story had been to date, and it was going to be talked about, I didn't give a shit how its talked about. But it was going to be treated in a.... I was basically giving the whole school a flare across their bow to say lads watch what's about to land in on top of you. And I didn't want them to have that level of control because I had worked so hard to try and be where I was that day it was like no, fuck you, you don't get to do this, this is my life, this is my story... and .... You're not even prepared to share any level of useful detail with your process so..... to some degree I felt like I needed to move first and I hated the fact that I was made, put in that situation...*

*Jane*

Jane also discussed how she ultimately lacked control in how she came in to contact with social work services in the first place, relating to the wider child protection obligation being placed upon her psychiatrist:

*When I went all the way back through the process and looked at where it had all kicked off it was from the psychiatrist who notified them.... So that was taken out of my hands, to a large degree all of it was out of my hands, that's ok I get that, people who are like me who are victims probably not safe to put it in their hands, so I respect the process in so far as they have to be detached from it.*

*Jane*

### *Delay*

The relationship between control and information is evident within the findings. Many of the participants experienced information being used as a source of control by either being withheld or used as a source of authority. One of the key frustrations expressed by the participants was the element of delay in the processing of their disclosure to social work and in respect of the frequency of

communication between social worker and adult. This is also dealt with in later sub-themes relating to 'The Void' and the sense of uncertainty and relates to the previous sub-theme relating to control. In this sub-theme narratives will be presented in respect of the participants' actual references to delay in the process. Patrick opens this sub-theme by firstly referencing his own delay, or period of 'cooling off' as he puts it, before finally deciding to contact the social work department. Paul also noted this previously in the context of control in that he wanted to be in the 'right place' before coming forward to disclose to social work services.

*I had a little sort of cool out... cooling out period before we started any work here....and... ah I'd say it was about ... .. two... and half maybe three months before I actually did the ...the what would you call it, the actual ... am ... wrote the letter and went to the HSE*

*Then it went in to.... The longest most protracted... undermining thing in the world... ah... it was twenty months 'til I heard something again from them*

*Patrick*

David also highlighted the lapse of time between the experience of abuse and the ability to come forward and disclose. David disclosed approximately 40 years after the abuse had occurred and he discusses this in terms of dealing with trauma in general:

*You know, and I heard there recently the holocaust people coming out and it took them all this time to talk, and I'm going well that was my holocaust and it just shows you, it was what, how long, that was 2010 so I was forty-seven, so forty years later.*

*David*

Patrick also discussed that it was a stress to him due to the familial nature of his experience of abuse that he didn't know when the letters were going to be sent out to his sister. In this piece he describes the extent of delay in receiving this notification even after the letters had been sent to his family members:

*it was over two years, let's say from the day I went in to the day the letters actually got sent out. And since then all we've heard back is that neither of them turned up for the meeting ...with the HSE*

*they went out the first week in May and it was about... .. two months later before [advocacy worker] got confirmation*

*but it was just that hanging on was just horrible... and I don't think until some of them have been on the other side of maybe experiencing that sort of thing that they'd get it. They wouldn't get that.*

*Patrick*

Tony also highlights his experience of delay following the initial letter he sent to the social work service. He goes on to show the intersection with his real life while waiting for a reply and ultimately details a subsequent delay which followed his initial meeting with the social worker:

*Anyway, we wrote a letter and ah ... .. it took about six weeks ... to get a reply ... .. initially.*

*We rearranged another meeting which took another two weeks because she was on holidays ... ah ... .. so all the time I'm going through all that, mulling over, ya know, I'm going through me battles, I had explained to my mother and father, who were trying to be supportive, but were making matters worse ya know ...*

*I gave her great detail in it and she said to me that she would have to talk to her ... .. manager or somebody at the time to see where they would go ... .. eleven months later... .. eleven months ... .. they came back to me ...*

*then it took another further ... .. I think three months ...  
before we all, it was almost like a final letter we got to say  
that ... .. ah having reviewed the ... the information that I  
had given and the information they had received from the  
perpetrator that they were happy to not proceed further and  
because of my age,*

*Tony*

### *Environment*

Another key element of the adults' interactions with social work services was the concept of the environment in which their meetings took place. Data in this sub-theme ranged from relating to the physical environment where the meeting was held to more nuanced occurrences within that environment. One such experience was presented by Jane which relates to the waiting room she was in prior to having a meeting with a social worker in a play room environment:

*... sat in the waiting room, twenty-five minutes, kids in and  
out, stress, and then back in to the crazy little room for little  
people, and am.... toys that were really old, I was like Jesus  
could you not go down to the Vincent De Paul and get new  
ones like it was just really sad the place am and...*

*Jane*

A further narrative, relayed by Paul, which addresses the interaction between social worker and adult also touches upon the adult's sense of the environment in which they are meeting the social worker. Paul describes his sense of unease with the environment in which he was initially interviewed by social workers, a hotel bar. He describes what he felt was the 'casual nature' of the environment and how this tainted his view of the social workers potentially taking a 'casual' attitude towards his disclosure of childhood abuse:

*... so I went over and I sat down and she introduced me, and the other girl she was with was absolutely lovely but still I don't know what her purpose was there, it was like maybe they, she was accompanying her as ... a colleague that they had two separate bits of business and she said "ah sure you may as well come along to this as well" ... they were drinking coffee there as well and, I don't know, it was ... .. now I'm looking back I'm kind of saying god (laugh) like ... I would like to think myself if, I wouldn't have brought someone in to that situation or environment knowing that ... what they were going to possibly disclose to me*

*Paul*

### *Belief*

Findings were identified in respect of the participants' sense of being believed. Alongside the next subtheme relating to language, these subthemes can be viewed within the wider macro ecological sphere. While they relate once again to personal experiences of interacting with social structures and services they are associated to wider socially constructed norms relating to belief and the construction of language as a demonstration of power.

*the first thing's doubt, do people actually believe what you're saying*

*Tony*

*they can't accept that what you are saying is true and you know you are back in to this rigmarole of like oh does anyone even fuckin care, do you even listen, you know, I know you can't say that you believe or therefore its true but you know... you don't equally have to treat as though I 've made it all up and this is exactly where I want to be sitting right now,*

*Jane*

Patrick speaks here about a sense of legitimisation about his disclosure in seeing it on paper. While having experienced abuse in his childhood he discusses the experience of being able to ‘officially’ state that this had happened. He goes on to highlight a sense of frustration which also ties in to the language sub-theme below when he comments on the use of the word ‘allegation’ in respect of his lived experience:

*and it was only when the people from One in Four started chasing them that they actually got back with anything and they were phone calls, there was no, no, nothing put on paper, it is quite a difference when you read something on official headed paper saying you know this has actually happened, .... this has actually happened.*

*it just made it very real and I think what it did was it legitimated it, it's one thing being in a counselling room with a counsellor who is kinda like trying to listen to you or whatever, but these [social workers] are professionals...*

*I understand for them it's all allegations up to a point but for me it's clearly not because it's my lived experience and I know it's real,*

*Patrick*

Tony speaks of another sense of belief where he discusses the information that social workers accepted from the perpetrator in respect of his experience of abuse. From the above section, we learned that Tony experienced a substantial delay before getting notification from the social work department that they were not going to assess his disclosure:

*And his [perpetrator's] report to the social worker ... .. was that he made me fondle him on one occasion and it was kind of accidental. And they accepted that ... ..*

*Ten years to find out what the actual statement was, and the finding was, and for them to believe him*

*Tony*

## *Language*

The participants spoke about language being used in different ways during their meetings with social workers. In addition to this we have already presented the experience of the initial letter from the social work department being cold and unfeeling. However, this sub-theme relates to the experience of language being used in the direct contact with the social workers.

Patrick discussed his experience of meeting with social workers to disclose his experiences of abuse. He was of the impression in this meeting that one of the social workers was present to learn the process. While he did not have any substantial issue with this he was conscious of the type of language being used to discuss the matter with him:

*I felt that some of them, they were nice enough to deal with,  
but it was almost like some of them were actually trying to  
show the newbie this is how you do this... a little. ... 'cause I  
was going, that language is not necessary, do you know what  
I mean*

*Patrick*

Paul was met by social workers in the lobby of a hotel. This placed a specific emphasis on his experience of the language used by the social workers due to the possibility of someone overhearing what was being discussed:

*...the language she used, anyone that was sitting close to us  
like and I'm like pretty sure people who probably heard the  
language she was using would have been in no doubt that I  
was, like, sexually abused as a child, like... because she was  
using language like and you know "the churches thing" and  
like ah or "our priority is to kind of make sure that he's out of  
ah ... .. he's out of harm's way" and "what happened you  
won't happen to any other individuals" and she was using  
terms like 'sexual abuse' and you know.. .ahm...*

*'paedophiles' and the... .. "these people have certain ahm...  
MO's ya know" ... .. and it comes to groom, and she was  
using words like 'groom' and stuff and like I found myself  
leaning in to her as in like, I was saying to myself at least if I  
lean in the her she might lower her voice like ya know ...*

*she uses all these like, all this inflammatory language that  
anyone, no one would have been in any doubt like why I was  
there speaking to her like ya know.*

*being considerate about the language they used while in a  
public place, ya know, all these things like like, they are all  
unfortunately, they're all basic things to me in my head that I  
would imagine that these should be no brainers like ya know.  
But ah unfortunately they weren't like, so.*

*Paul*

## Information

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*...to this day I have no idea what happened..... never..... I walked out of the room, I sent her more emails... ah... I have never been told... I never got a follow up..... I did get a follow up sorry, I got told... you'll never be told... that's what I got told....*

*Jane*

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Following the disclosure and the experience of the interaction with services the next theme is entitled 'Information'. This theme ties together data presented by the participants in respect of the information they shared with social work services, information they sought and information they received. The entire theme presents the participants' expectation of a certain level of *quid pro quo* and their overall sense that this was not met in their interactions with social work services. The predominant feeling was that information was withheld or was insufficient to allow the adult to have a clear picture of what was happening in respect of their disclosure.

Despite this, the participants had a sense of possibly overburdening individuals with their experiences. The participants also spoke about more information being sought by social workers despite the adults feeling that they had already shared a significant amount. Taken together, this led to a sense of uncertainty amongst the participants and two sub-themes chart the consequences of this uncertainty. The first of these sub-themes, entitled 'The Void', charts a very similar use of language across the sample to describe their experiences after sharing their disclosure. The second of these sub-themes charts the ultimate result of this uncertainty and portrays the adults' sense of not knowing what was happening with their disclosure and more significantly what was going to happen. This sub-theme is entitled 'The Grenade Effect' following one

participant's acute analogy which will be presented in conclusion of this section.

In terms of the adult's microsystem sub-themes related to the 'Information Provided by the Adult', 'Information sought by the adult' and a very definite sense of 'Uncertainty' experienced across the sample.

### *Information Provided by the Adult*

Many of the participants commented on the extent of the information that they had provided to the social work department. The adults referred to what they felt were very detailed statements of their experiences, often initially developed for therapeutic or legal processes:

*I had sent her a document, a written document of my story, in inverted commas, and that story was about ten pages long, typed, and it was a story that would form the tapestry of the basis of the civil case, so it was a story that I wrote for my solicitor when he gave me four months to go off and think about what I really wanted to consider if I was going to take a civil case. And in order to consider that I needed to get that down very clearly in my own mind so I had multiple iterations of what that story was from an editing perspective.... And just, it was kind of almost like a cathartic catalyst to deciding am I going to do this or am I not. So that same document I sent to the HSE....*

*Jane*

Patrick discussed the fact that he had previously been engaged with the HSE and had informed them about the abuse he had experienced. He had this information in his initial letter to the social work department along with the details of the abuse he experienced and two named perpetrators of the abuse, being his sisters. He comments here on the social worker's reaction to this information that he had shared. In his later quote, he hints at a sense of not

having shaped the information in a more ‘heavy hitting’ manner. This potentially ties in to the adult’s sense of trying to have his statement believed or almost a need to ‘sell’ the information to social work:

*the HSE, they actually did a funny thing at that initial meeting when I disclosed to them... they turned around and said have you ever told anyone else about this, well I said yeah a counsellor here, a counsellor there, I said I actually told two HSE officials... and this was two and a half years previously, ... and I said, one of them more or less dismissed me and the other sort of went “ah right yeah” ... and I was going... yet when I’m talking to people in One in Four they seem to think its real,*

*I’m feeling fine, but I don’t feel I actually sold some of it hard enough or maybe I should have been a bit more heavy hitting with some of it*

*Patrick*

Tony echoes this sense of having provided very specific detail to the social work department prior to his initial meeting:

*...so, I explained in great detail, and I mean in great detail of, ... all the sexual abuse ... where it happened, when it happened, what time it happened, the month it happened, the season it happened ... I explained details in the bedroom, details in the local cinema where it took place as well ... ahm ... ya know ... and people who were in the property at the time and I gave her great detail in it and she said to me that she would have to talk to her ... manager or somebody at the time to see where they would go ...*

*Tony*

### *Information Sought by the Adult*

The participants shared various experiences of seeking information from the social work department or information being sought on their behalf by their

advocacy worker. Predominantly these narratives were expressed in the context of not receiving an adequate response or leading to a delay in feedback from the social work department. Jane's comments open this section highlighting the sense of frustration in trying to seek information from the social work department:

*So, three visits, multiple emails, a couple of phone calls, I had never made a phone call, [advocacy worker] made all the phone calls, only to badger them and say look, we both know what's going on here, can you just give me some information of where things are at, "no",*

*Jane*

Patrick discusses the lack of contact that he experienced relative to the amount of effort that was being put in to the seeking of information. As discussed in a previous sub-theme, Patrick emphasises the possible consequence of not receiving this information. He specifically spoke about the impact on his family in that his abusers are his sisters:

*I think we only had two responses from them out of maybe... about twenty... attempts to contact them to see what was going on*

*they said they would tell me... when the letters had actually went out and they didn't, it was only after chasing and chasing...*

*There were a couple of missed phone calls, but I clearly told the person that, you know tomorrow I'm available on the phone but I'll have it switched off tomorrow afternoon and her message goes straight to the inbox. And I went that's fucking shite, she's just getting rid of me. Message straight to the inbox at like quarter to five, this sort of... do you know what I mean. I can read this.*

*Patrick*

Tony received a letter after a significant delay from the social work department to say that they were not proceeding with an assessment of his disclosure. He speaks here about writing a reply to this letter seeking a rationale from the social work department:

*Ah we wrote a letter back, ahm ... stating that we weren't happy with her findings and asked for evidential ...ahm... information in relation to what statement he made. I was told under freedom of [Information], I wasn't entitled to that because it was third party information, they weren't able to disclose what he had actual said...*

*Tony*

### *Uncertainty*

Following on from the above sub-themes, narratives in this sub-theme relate to the sense of uncertainty that the participants experienced throughout their interactions with social work as a result of the lack of clear information or follow-up. As mentioned, two further sub-themes will explore the specific effects of this under the titles of 'The Void' and 'The Grenade Effect'.

Jane opens this piece by discussing the lead in to her first meeting with social work. She spoke about not having 'insatiable anxiety' but she discusses how the lack of basic information about where the meeting was being held fed in to her confusion:

*and classic HSE style like 'oh yeah come and meet us here', like the campus of the regional facility is like a tiny, it's like a small university. It's like where do I go, it's like nine o'clock in the morning I have no idea I have never been here in my life. No signage, no nothing, no google maps like as in like oh go here, you come in the entrance turn right, like nothing. And no kinda hand holding through, this person will be here to meet you, this is what is going to happen.*

*even a little ...sketch on the back of a napkin would have helped...*

*Jane*

Describing the lead in to his interview with social work, Paul mentions how the lack of information about the context and set up of the meeting also fed in to his anxieties prior to the meeting:

*... I didn't get anything about how many people would be there I was, when I was travelling up in the car I was thinking, I don't know. How many people am I walking in to here. What's this going to be, it was still in the back of my mind that ... I thought I was a little bit disrespected and you know it was taken seriously when she cancelled the first time like,*

*Paul*

Patrick, again highlighting his sense of uncertainty regarding the letters that would be sent out to his sisters, commented that:

*no one actually wrote to me and said the letters have gone out, I was told they were going to send me a letter saying they have actually gone out today,*

*Patrick*

### *Information from Professionals*

Also in the context of interactions within the mesosystem the adults spoke about issues relating to 'Information from Professionals' in terms of what they received or were told. Following on from a presentation of the data related to the information shared by the adults the following sub-theme relates to the *quid pro quo* nature of the relationship (sharing child protection information in

return for information about what is happening their disclosure) and examines the level of information shared with the adult from the social work department. Jane explained how the social worker took her through the rationale for the meeting once it had begun and that she received a follow up email from the social worker reminding her of the extra information that was being sought:

*... she was really nice but she couldn't tell me anything, she was just like 'Ok so you know we got this notification.... we got this letter from Dr. X and ah .... We're obviously very concerned and .... you know we'd like to know we'd like to understand a little bit more about what the circumstances are of what happened to you', in fairness to her she did say, this is what we would like to talk to you about and ... we would need to go and speak to the institution, the school ...*

*she sent me a follow up email to remind me of what she was asking me for and like I have no doubt she ticked all of her boxes in terms of what she was supposed to do*

*Jane*

Jane also commented that she was provided with an option to ask the social work department not to proceed with the assessment of her disclosure:

*Now, they said, now if you don't want us to proceed with.... I think they did say to me if you really don't want us to proceed with anything we won't.... I think they did give me that option*

*Jane*

Patrick stated that the social worker did talk him through the process but that he felt this was 'very caged' as to what they could do in respect of his disclosure. Patrick believes that this was due to legal concerns on the part of the social worker. Patrick, again highlighting the use of language by the social worker and the possible impact of this on the adult, discussed the use of the word 'allegation':

*she was actually grand on the phone ... we went through the procedures, what's likely and all this, it was very caged obviously for legal reasons for her and what she can actually promise and all that.... and everything for her still being allegations and there being no, ...you know.... ah.... Hard proof or whatever, however it was ah... that was actually quite hopeful,*

*Patrick*

Tony discussed some of the information he received in a letter from the social work department. He said this letter included information that he felt he maybe should not have been privileged to but that it went some way to explaining how the matter was being handled by the social work department and their own legal department:

*... there was a... ... bone of contention between the HSE solicitor and the social work manager ... ... the solicitor suggested that they should do a follow up but the manager in the HSE, in the social work department ... ahm ... thought that they shouldn't, and that was actually documented in a letter, now I don't know if I should have received that, but it was definitely documented that there was a conflict of interest between their solicitor and the social work manger ...*

*Tony*

Paul discussed some of the information that he received from the social worker prior to her meeting with him. This initial meeting was cancelled but Paul stated that some of the process and rationale for the meeting was explained to him prior to meeting; unlike Jane's experience above where she was unsure what would happen when she went to meet with the social workers. Paul also describes how the social worker explained that there would be two social workers attending the meeting. This level of detail is also in contrast to David's experience as described above where he stated that he was unsure how many would be in attendance and that he was anxious if there might be three as this

would be too much for him. After the cancelation of Paul's initial meeting however, he was not informed how many social workers would be attending the re-scheduled meeting and this did present as a source of stress for him:

*she explained who she was and said that ... we've got your details, that you wanted to speak to us or whatever and she said ... ahm ... what I'll do is something along the lines of I'll ring you and I'll tell you, I'll give you a date and ... .. I can come to [place name] to meet you or, she was based in [place name] I think and ah ... .. we can take, we can go through whatever then and I said yeah sure grand great and she rang me then ... she said ahh... .. I'll meet you above ahm wherever and we can do this and I'll take your statement and we'll go through the procedures that we have to follow and this and that or whatever.*

*she gave me a place where we'd meet ... and a time ... and she informed me that there was going to be two people with her herself plus one. There'd be two. So, I said yeah and I was aware, at least I was aware that I was meeting two people.*

*Paul*

### *More Detail Needed*

As discussed above many of the participants shared prepared statements with the social work department prior to meeting with them. These statements were of a level of detail sufficient for legal and therapeutic purposes, however many adults spoke about being told that this level of detail was not sufficient. The following piece from Jane highlights her sense of frustration at being asked to provide a new statement to social workers, implying that previous disclosures should have been taken in to account. Jane begins by talking about the statement she provided, which she had previously prepared for her legal team:

*So, it made for very uncomfortable reading and am.... but I didn't have, as I said, the energy to sit there and try and say it*

*again I had sat in front of multiple psychiatrists at this stage, barristers, solicitors, I was like this is just process, just read the document, I am not explaining it to you....*

*Jane*

Jane spoke about the statement she had prepared for her solicitor in the context of preparing to take a legal case against her abuser. She provided this statement to the social worker prior to meeting with them and despite, what Jane describes as, the detailed nature of the document, she felt the social worker was pushing her for more detail. Jane goes on to state that she was asked for a level of detail that she felt she could not provide. Jane ultimately questioned how useful that level of detail could be in regard to assessing her disclosure:

*... how much more detail do you need than what is already in that document which goes in to an awful lot of detail about you know, a female teacher screwing a fifteen-year-old student over the course a two and half year period, like it's pretty detailed for my solicitors ... like we were going in to moments in time ...*

*they asked question that would have been virtually impossible for me to answer in terms of like, like it was sixteen years previously ahh.... So, it was quite a long time but am... like micro, like nano moments, would you remember when she leaned over you, was she like holding your hand or was she touching you. Just like (laugh) I wouldn't even fuckin remember that from yesterday*

*I didn't understand how it would be more useful based on what I had already provided, but somehow, she felt it was insanely relevant and actually could not proceed without it....*

*Jane*

Patrick also commented on the social workers seeking more information. Patrick emphasised that some prior warning in relation to what was going to be

sought would have been useful before the meeting given the sensitive nature of the material being discussed:

*what I found was a little odd was that they asked some questions, I wasn't kind of prepared for. Not that I had to go in scripted but I'd given them... a letter I'd thought about ... and I was ready to talk about that. Then there was all these other things they were asking, and I was saying..., god I could have, if I'd had even pre-warning of extra information there were looking for, a little sit down before hand, because it's not like you're chatting about the football match that just happened last night, you are chatting about something big...*

*Patrick*

#### *How the Disclosure Information will be Used*

Within the wider exo-system findings were identified in respect of the adult's concerns about how the disclosure information would be used. Jane explains the sense of unease that arose when she was told how her disclosure might be used. Her description also encompasses a sense of a lack of control, echoed earlier, and a sense of a grenade about to go off, highlighted later in this theme:

*what's going to happen now are ye going to go talk to the school or are you going to go.... And she said well you know we'll have to see, like they wouldn't commit to anything and I was like can you not just tell me what happens ...so I was like well I kind of know, I kind of like to know if you are going to tell them [school], she was like 'that's not your concern', no, that's absolutely my concern. So, there was definitely a very strong theme of .... You have nothing to do with this.... Just be really clear...you are a cog in a wheel this is our gig this is our process you will not be kept informed of anything to do with it, other than thank you for this information good night and good luck*

*Jane*

Again, echoing other sub-themes such as Uncertainty, Control and the Grenade effect (below) Patrick highlights what he calls the ‘wishy-washy’ nature of the information he received about what may or may not happen his disclosure:

*because initially I was hearing sort of prospects of oh well they'd get me two sisters in and they'd probably interview the kids and stuff like that ... but it all then started coming backwards ... maybe if your sisters turn up and if they divulge anything well then, and this was kind of after... ya know me... going down to the HSE, they start getting wishy washy, because initially they said this is usually what happens, ya know the way things go, yeah well there's no such thing as usually or hypothetically*

*Patrick*

#### *Child Protection information*

In the macro environment relating to overarching policy, law and social work procedure findings were identified in respect of the wider obligations in respect of ‘Child Protection’ and the ultimate reality that the adults’ disclosure is part of a child protection process with an aim of safeguarding and protecting children and not adults.

*they're focus needed to be on who was at risk right today and how do we, how do we harness the situation to try and understand how serious it is. Ahm... so it was very much like, yeah sorry for your worries there but actually we need to go and make sure everyone else is ok*

*Jane*

*I had previously been to counselling and stuff for other issues which will probably arise later on ...during the session but am... one of their... sort of criteria was that ... if people are*

*still around ...and they have the potential of being in contact  
with kids we have to go to the HSE*

*Patrick*

Paul spoke of his own sense of obligation to protect children:

*my primary concern was to make sure... that there was every  
... every possible mechanism in place to stop the individual  
from ... further ... you know abusing, you know sexually  
abusing other children 'cause he was still practicing and he's  
not anymore which ... you know is some bit of ... ahm  
relief to me or comfort ...*

*Paul*

### *The Void*

'The Void', which was highlighted by four out of the five adults, related to an experience which occurred following their disclosure to social work services. Following their disclosure, they talked about delay in a general sense (see subtheme above), but they also discussed the effect such delays had on them in terms of it being like 'falling off a cliff', 'entering a void' or a 'black hole'. It was stark from the findings the similar metaphors utilised by the participants in respect of this shared experience:

*but it was then to go into this big void after all that,  
Could I see a copy of the letter, am I allowed see a copy of  
the letter that went out, am I allowed see what's on file and  
it's a big black hole at the moment there's nothing there.*

*Patrick*

Tony uses a similar metaphor of 'limbo' to describe not knowing what would happen or what to do after making his disclosure to social work services:

*... so that left me in limbo to, should I report to the guards, are they going to proceed, are not going to proceed, are the HSE doing something about it, are they not doing something about it, what's social work going to do.*

*Tony*

*then there was this sudden, literally I just went to the edge and just fell off... and there was nothing.*

*Patrick*

Patrick gives an example of how this void can affect someone and what a person does with this:

*...that void is going to be filled with something... and usually the imagination. And usually the imagination of somebody who has been sexually abused isn't necessarily the ... straightforward imagination. It's probably going to be more paranoid, more ahm shame and guilt treatment and all those sorts of things and ahm... they must know this, some of them have to have read a book on this somewhere, they must get it even vaguely intellectually if not from a lived experience or not from having worked closely with people to go 'this is important'...*

*Patrick*

### *The Grenade Effect*

The 'Grenade Effect', was described by one of the participants as an analogy of his experience of having made his disclosure and then not knowing what was going to happen next due to the lack of information and the lack of control over who would find out and what they would do. This sub-theme is very closely related to the previous subtheme, 'The Void', and explains the possible effects of 'The Void'. The 'grenade' analogy is apt for similar sentiments shared by other participants and these data provided here seek to demonstrate this sense of

heightened suspension, waiting for something to go ‘bang’! Patrick shared the analogy:

*... ‘cause you took the pin out of the grenade and you count to ten and ... .. (tapping table) months later, still going on, ... and you know I still don’t know where I stand*

*Patrick*

Patrick describes a detailed picture of how this grenade effect impacts upon his personal and family life and he presents a scenario from his own experience that shows the consequences of not knowing what is happening with his disclosure to social work:

*...pulling in to the road and looking for cars. ... which was a terrible way to live and especially if you know, they could have got a letter and I could be driving in here ... .. so I always had to ring my mam and say who’s there... and try and find out if anyone’s around... because if the letters went out and no one said anything and they’re waiting for me to land ... that’s a terrible thing to go through for ... .. the guts of two years, ya know.*

*Patrick*

Jane had embarked upon a legal process in respect of her experiences of abuse at the hands of a teacher in her school. During this time, she also was beginning her engagement with the Social Work department and due to the lack of information was worried that social work might contact the school and ‘blow her cover’ in respect of setting up a legal case against the teacher. She was also worried due to the lack of a clear pathway regarding the social work process that some retribution might follow contact from the social work office with the school. Whether or not the consequences as she saw them are metaphor or exaggeration her concerns were genuine in respect of not knowing what would happen next:

*And I was like... I get that, you know, in so far as that's the way things have sometimes have to work but I felt given the nature of the detail of it and my concerns around how is this gonna pan, you know are you guys... am I gonna.... Am I gonna have someone try to burn down my fucking house in three days' time...*

*Jane*

## Social Work

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*I felt sorry for them... that they were put in that situation that it was like, here's the new guidelines don't fuckin... mess it up, if someone calls you be sure you photocopy that and read that out to them. Meanwhile back at the ranch they are looking after all these little people who are so distressed.*

*Jane*

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While the above findings present a picture of the adult and their experience of disclosing to social work, some specific findings were identified in respect of the social work system itself. These do not have a micro context but would, and did, ultimately impact upon the adults who participated.

### *Impact of Engaging with Social Work*

This sub-theme relates to narratives shared by the participants in respect of ways in which they were impacted following engaging with social work. Some of these are statements of direct cause and effect however others are subtler. Tony describes a significant consequence of his negative engagement with social work. Like Paul, Tony's initial meeting with the social work department was cancelled. While Paul's meeting was cancelled by phone and rescheduled Tony did not receive a phone call:

*she didn't turn up ... ahm ... she phoned... after ... the time.*

*So, I spent an hour in counselling, in a rage ... ah ... and then she rang after the hour that I was in, to say that she couldn't make it that she had got held up in court. Ahm ... my opinion at that stage was ... that mobile phones were all the*

*rage in 2000 why didn't she ring, ya know there was no excuse for her not to ring. If she was going to be late she should have rang... so that was an immediate bad experience of Social Workers within the HSE service.*

*Tony*

As described earlier, Paul was met in a hotel bar by two social workers, one of which was from his home town and potentially knew his family, who were not yet aware of Paul's experience. Paul described that these biographical details were known to the social work department prior to the meeting and that this could have been taken in to account when selecting the staff to attend. Paul's initial meeting with social work was also cancelled and he felt that the primary social worker was implying to him that he could have emailed his statement as opposed to the social worker coming to meet him. Having left this meeting Paul reflected on how he felt, and what consequence this has had:

*...so, I kind of left it go and ... to say I though no more of it would be a ... .. wouldn't be accurate (laughs) like ah I probably did think, I was annoyed about it for a few days like ya know*

*The biggest thing I can say is that it kind of it made me not want to engage with them like.*

*Paul*

### *Competency of Social Worker*

Issues were also presented in respect of not just the system but also the competency of the social worker who met with the adult. While much of these findings fit well within the wider exosystem in that they are the result of systemic issues, there are also individual social work practice issues highlighted. Jane begins by saying that the social worker that she met was friendly but that she didn't feel that she was sufficiently competent to manage the information that Jane was sharing:

*like don't get me wrong she was a nice girl ahh... I didn't feel like she had a lot of experience in this particular area, I felt like child protection yeah, I bet she probably knows quite a lot about that but not about like sexual abuse... am... and ...  
.... I just... yeah.... again, captain, plane...*

*it was just a total lack of, lack of detail, lack of competence,*

*My experience with them was that they were inexperienced and therefore incompetent. They didn't show any level of confidence... with dealing with me in the situation so.... Their immediate reaction in order to dominate the scenario was to exercise one hundred percent control, so lock it down, we control this from here on in. that was it*

*Jane*

Patrick highlights how the level of incompetency that he experienced seems to have also been flagged by a more senior social worker in the social work department:

*I had one phone call with the head social worker there who was taking charge, it seems like she came in and was basically.... mopping up, I got the impression from the tone, the way she was expressing things, she was mopping up after somebody who wasn't particularly crossing the t's and dotting the I's in the place*

*Patrick*

However, Patrick's final experience was that of a lack of professionalism and mismanagement of the assessment of his disclosure:

*I think I was kind overall very disappointed with them...  
ahhh... and I thought near the end they certainly lacked any  
professionalism...*

*there's something unsettling that you can't coordinate two  
offices to send out a letter ... .. and that takes over twenty  
months.*

*Patrick*

Following on from Tony's negative experience above he goes on to comment on the level of professionalism he experienced from the social worker and the level of competency:

*well the first thing about it was ... the level of professionalism  
wasn't there, ya know, arranged the meeting and then didn't  
turn up for the meeting, but then no phone call until after the  
fact ... then a second meeting they took a statement I gave  
great detail and it took them six weeks to come back, with  
anything. And then they actually in fact come back with  
nothing ... .. didn't help me out... like something as serious  
as that ...*

*Tony*

### *Restrictions on Social Workers*

Between the exo system and the wider legal and policy domain of the macro system, findings were identified in respect of the potential and actual restrictions upon social workers in processing and assessing disclosures by adults. Jane discusses her interaction with social work and following on from

the sub-theme above relating to competency shared some sense of empathy with the social workers on the frontline:

*I wouldn't.... I felt sorry for them, yeah, I had a huge... I felt sorry for them. And I wouldn't be angry with either of them as individuals at all, ... I felt they were completely ill equipped to deal with what I was talking about, so.*

*Jane*

Patrick adds to this sense of empathy for the social workers, sharing his understanding of the complex and often over-arching legal context of such referrals that can often restrict social workers in their assessment worker lead to social workers being 'cagey' when dealing with such disclosures. In the latter quote David also shares this understanding of the wider legal context and wonders if this is the reason for social workers' behaviour in dealing with these types of referrals:

*I get the legal aspects and all that and I get the frustration that if you are trying to do something like that and somebody has a few bob and a solicitor they can make it go away by doing a technicality, you know, that's, I get why they need to be very careful and cagey and all that, I understand all that.*

*Patrick*

*... it was tough ... .. but you know I suppose ... if there's somebody coming along and giving a false [statement], you've got to, you got to you know, you can't take everybody at their word, you know and if there's somebody coming along giving false stuff, I don't; know if that's the reason for it, I presume it is I don't know, I haven't; a clue.*

*David*

As we can see from these narratives shared by the adults, data presented in this sub-theme relates to statements by the participants which demonstrates their awareness of the political, economic and practical environment in which the

social workers operated and the consequences of their disclosures and where they fit in the wider scheme of child protection. Tony begins this piece by acknowledging the environment within which social workers were working at the time of his disclosure and are currently working due to staff shortages:

*I know that the health service is under serious pressure, I work within the health service and they're cutting wages, I've been part of that. I worked in the private sector for long enough, I know what it's like to have money, I've worked in the public sector and I know what it's like to have money, I've had all my stuff cut, but ...*

*Tony*

Jane also presents an acknowledgement of the social workers' working conditions, but here referring to the working guidelines and the need to continually keep up to date. In the latter quote, Jane also presents an awareness of where her disclosure fits in the wider child protection system and what its significance is for social workers:

*I felt sorry for them... that they were put in that situation that it was like, here's the new guidelines don't fuckin... mess it up, if someone calls you be sure you photocopy that and read that out to them. Meanwhile back at the ranch they are looking after all these little people who are so distressed.*

*...remembering too that the purpose of your meeting, my meeting, with them is fundamentally not about what happened to me it's about protecting children today and tomorrow*

*Jane*

Jane again hints at this sense of social workers being somewhat guarded in their practice regarding adults disclosing childhood abuse. While she expresses feeling supported by a second social worker she meets, she echoes other participants' sentiments in respect of the underlying legalistic aspect of

disclosure of abuse, and the social worker's apparent apprehension in relation to this:

*So am.... she was very uncomfortable with, I felt, she was really nice and I felt she was much more competent than the previous girl I had met and she was by way of her station, it seemed, and ahm... very officious as well though and, I have to say though, you know very like ... warm and wanting to help am and saying all the, you know, genuinely saying all the right things and ahm, you know stopping short of completely sympathising for fear that that would acknowledge the fact that everything I said was true...*

*Jane*

### *Social Work Process*

Finally, findings were identified in respect of the wider sub-theme relating to the 'Social Work process'. These findings relate to the participants' experiences and insights in to the process of having their disclosure received by social workers and what happened after that. Tony provides an insight in to his experience of the process of making a retrospective disclosure to social work; he begins by presenting the basic questions he was asked and then what happened as part of the assessment, albeit after a significant delay:

*so ... a further meeting was organised, and like you, she sat down in front of me and asked me a series of questions. My name, age, date of birth, all the usual ... questions ahm ... ..  
... and what I was referring,*

*...eleven months ... .. they came back to me ...  
and said that they had interviewed my perpetrator who was my uncle, and his family they had got his side of the story. ...*

*... ..*

*Tony*

Jane explains how she got the sense from the social workers that something was being done but shared her frustration at not being able to get specific details regarding what this 'something' was:

*No, no sense of, we know what's happening here, we have got this, we can't guarantee a good outcome, we can't guarantee anything, but we can tell you what's going to happen and we can keep you informed.... in so far as we are allowed from a legal perspective, you gotta meet us half way on the fact that that is, you, nobody is guilty until, you know, blah blah blah, but they didn't even have the ability to... I think they said some of that but they never followed through on any of it so... very... Broken, officious process, that actually isn't really a process. So that was my experience.*

*Jane*

Again, highlighting the significant legal context of such referrals, Patrick mentions the Barr Judgement which is one of the key legal precedents in respect of adult disclosures to social work services and how he felt this was used as an excuse:

*... and all this mentioning of the Barr Judgement this and the Barr Judgement that, and I'm going yeah, I'm a human being here, you know, stop watching your pockets there's ways of doing this without always looking to see who's going to bring you to court without doing things in a sloppy manner.*

*Patrick*

Patrick goes on to add that because the start of the process was initially supportive and moved fast he was even more effected by the lack of progress in the end:

*I think because I was set up initially, they were so clear in their correspondence back to me, come in, and it was very quick, I think I got the letter, like ok they sent out the letter on whatever date, but again I got the letter it was within ten days*

*they wanted to meet me... so that's quick... and I thought  
stuff would progress and I was kind of (intake of breath) right  
let's get ready for this now, ya know,*

*Patrick*

## Reflection

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*...the people in this country don't know how to deal with sexual violence, sexual abuse, they just don't know how to deal with it, they don't have enough experience.*

*Tony*

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While touching upon issues dealt with in the various themes above, the following theme, entitled 'Reflection', relates to the way the adults presented certain narratives in a reflective manner; looking back at their experiences of disclosure and trying to form meaning and seek rationale for their experiences. The theme contains sub-themes relating to the adults' reflections on their experiences of disclosure, both positive and negative, their experiences of reactions to their disclosure, their hopes and expectations and their attempts at meaning making. The first of these sub-themes relates to the adults' reflections on disclosure.

### *Reflection on Disclosure*

Reflecting on his disclosure to social work services, Patrick spoke about the intra-familial aspect of the abuse he experienced and the possible impacts of not knowing when his disclosure was going to be investigated. This was a primary concern and source of frustration for Patrick that run through the entire narrative he shared. In the second quote from Patrick he reflects upon the intra-familial aspect of this:

*I said I need to know this because it has impacts, it's not like they're someone I bumped into once on a holiday or something, this is, you know this is big stuff, I didn't get that and I felt quiet let down by that... and I got quite angry and,*

*ah I didn't go in roaring or shouting but I was trying to push  
for them to come back to me a say right what's happening,  
what's happening, what's happening...*

*Patrick*

*So, like I had stuff in my head, I was walking in to situations  
not knowing, my wife and me were walking into situations  
with the little fella after he was born and we're going...  
...what's going on here... Am... not knowing if something has  
happened, if it hasn't and you know what I mean, I think it  
was just the fact that they said they would tell me... when the  
letters had actually went out and they didn't*

*Patrick*

Tony also shares this sense of frustration and reflects on his experience of disclosure to social work and whether it helped or hindered him in the end. Tony concludes this quote saying how the whole experience made him 'throw in the towel'. This sense of frustration and disengagement from the social work process is also echoed by Paul in the second quotation:

*It only intensified the trauma for me, it only got me to a worse  
place, it didn't make things better for me it made things worse  
for me ... to the point where I actually just threw the towel in  
and walked away, for ten years. ...*

*Tony*

*I'm sure there's people there who have great experiences but  
ah I wasn't one of them at all at all. And it's made me  
disengage now, ya know, I haven't been in contact with them.  
I haven't heard anything from them since and whatever way  
they take, I'll just take my statement that I done in One in  
Four and post it to some head of something down there, ya  
know, that's, that'll be my way but I'm not going to engage  
with them any further especially the individual in question. So  
that, that's all I'm going to say about that.*

*Paul*

Paul also discusses the significance of disclosure of childhood abuse in a general sense and emphasises his thinking on the lead up to a meeting with social workers to make a disclosure:

*Coming forward to someone is a massive, massive thing to do. It's a massive thing to do and even like speaking to you today I don't have to go in to details about you know, and it's some relief that you know I don't have to go into details of my experience of sexual abuse. But even then, it's still a little a bit, probably I was a little bit anxious coming in*

*Paul*

Paul also goes on to highlight one of the difficult issues around disclosing to social work. An issue that may seem obviously but is perhaps at risk of being taken for granted:

*Something that's very very personal like ya know, that you're going to disclose and speak to someone. As I said like if you haven't told those closest to you about it, like ya know, and you're going to tell a, you're going to talk to a stranger about it you know.*

*Paul*

Again, highlighting the inter-relationship of influences that play out over time, Paul speaks about that build up to disclosing to social work and what should be taken in to account when that occurs:

*Consider that those, the people you're going to meet are probably all that week leading up to it thinking about it, going through it, re-living what's happened to them, ya know, going back to a place where they don't necessarily want to be, want to visit, like ya know. All these things like that have to be taken in to account. And it shouldn't be me sitting here saying that these things ya know, these are the professionals*

*that should know this, the Psychologists whoever's putting the guidelines in place you know, professionals in the field, they're all fairly basics to me to be honest that weren't got right in my experience and it's only my experience.*

*Paul*

Jane reflects on her experience of disclosure and looks back with a sense that the social work service didn't really engage with her, or were just going through the motions, she highlights an initial positive relationship with the social worker:

*I have to say though, you know very like ... warm and wanting to help am and saying all the, you know, genuinely saying all the right things*

*... I always felt there was that kind of sense, of jaysus we better just do this now and tick the boxes and make sure that we express the right emotions on que and then hopefully it's all just so ambiguous and we push so much paper around that we don't really have to do anything about it*

*Jane*

Patrick described a positive aspect of his disclosure to social work as being a sense that the fact that he was disclosing to a State body meant that his experience was being in some way legitimated:

*that was sort of my big, my big sort of weight off, in that no this has been in some way legitimated and ah... I'm not just being a little sensitive about this, this is as big and is actually as, you know, inappropriate as I'm saying it is and it is as ... ah... bad as I'm saying it is.*

*Patrick*

Patrick's sense of legitimisation highlights the significance of 'belief' for those coming forward to disclose abuse. While Patrick gained this sense of

legitimatisation, Tony highlights the potential negative side of a reaction to a disclosure and how being handed from one social worker to another affected him (reactions to disclosures will be specifically examined in the next sub-theme):

*Absolute torture... torture. You're wondering are, the first thing's doubt, do people actually believe what you're saying and the fact that you have to tell, you've told one person and that's difficult enough, and then you have to tell a complete stranger that's difficult enough, and then it's six weeks, ya know nothing like, and then eleven months and another period of time, and then it's another person and then another person and then it's a letter ... ..*

*Tony*

Unfortunately, for the adults who participated in this study the predominant experience of engaging with social work services to make their disclosure was negative:

*So yeah, I think the HSE was kind of disappointing and just unnecessary stress ... .. ahm ... .. that there was no need for,*

*Patrick*

*It was very few encounters I had with them, two or whatever, but it wasn't good, it wasn't good at all like. It was shocking, when you ... like... when you take the actual subject matter, what the complaint is and stuff like ya know... .. ahm ... .. yeah that's more or less my experience,*

*Paul*

## *Reactions to Disclosure*

Reactions to disclosures of childhood abuse are critically important to the adult's sense of being believed, sense of trust and their ability to continue to engage and make further disclosures. The following sub-theme presents a sample of some of the reactions received by the participants of this study. While such experiences cannot be generalised it is clear how such reactions can taint the adult's entire experience of disclosure:

*So am, disclosed to my family and was referred to a psychiatrist, ah on the basis of getting a baseline take on what was the damage done what are we dealing with, I do come from a medical background so it was a natural course of action for them to want to take in terms of protecting me and wanting to understand what the hell they were dealing with.*

*Jane*

David and Jane note reactions they received when they met with social work services and how these impacted upon them:

*at the end the little girl at the end who was taking the notes said, "that was a lot of talk" she said. And that was kind of hurtful. She said, "that was a lot of talk" and when I went out [Therapist] said to me "that was tough".*

*David*

*The process, the process, that particular process is absolutely not about the victim, in the way that I experienced it. Ahm.... I felt that it seemed as though, they, the HSE workers made it very clear.... that.... they were sorry for what had happened to me but they weren't really going to spend an awful lot of time on my woes.*

*Jane*

### *Hopes and Expectations*

This sub-theme presents statements where the participants shared their views on what they wished had happened or what they thought would happen when engaging with social work regarding their disclosure. The comments could be viewed as possible learning points for social work practice and policy. Jane opens this section, showing how she placed her expectations for a competent service within the wider historical context of how those effected by abuse have been dealt with in Ireland:

*I just felt .... Really depleted and deflated by it, I just thought,  
I came out here this morning and lied about my dental  
appointment to my boss, in the hope that I would experience  
something... competent, experience something like, oh yeah  
you know the last fifteen years of shit storm of abuse and  
allegations against the HSE, we've got that under control, we  
are a new, fresh team with new guidelines, we know how to  
deal with these complaints even as retrospective as yours is.*

*You know, you kind of hope that, you know, that your faith in  
humanity will be restored somewhat by the body that's  
supposed to protect children in this country given everything  
we've been through*

*Jane*

Patrick's main hope and expectation running through his entire narrative was that he would be told when letters were being sent out to his two abusers so that he could prepare himself and his family and have a sense of legitimisation that his abuse was now 'official'. He spoke about the types of things he would have liked to experience in his interaction with social work and what would have helped him:

*bit of clear communication could have sorted a lot out and I  
could have been kept informed*

*...these are the important things, clarity, keeping someone up to date, even if it's fairly banal say this is what I can tell you this is what you're getting and this is where we are today, ahm... especially when you ask for it...*

*Patrick*

Significantly, a key piece for Patrick is that if he had been kept informed about how things did eventually occur, he may not have come forward to social work at all:

*... 'all we can promise you at the moment is a letter goes, out they might ignore it'. Now if they'd said that originally ... .. I mightn't have bothered me arse coming up in some ways ... whereas that isn't what happened, I wasn't aware it was so easy to just walk away*

*Patrick*

Many of the adults also shared their views on what would have been of use to them during the process of engaging with social work services ranging from clear communication of the process, statutory guidelines and support, and a confidential environment. Like Patrick, Tony felt a simple letter would have gone a long way to easing his frustration and clarifying the process. Ultimately, Tony felt that support for adults coming forward should be made statutory and that such support should also be afforded to those receiving the information, i.e. social workers in this instance. In the second quote, we see that Paul shared similar sentiments:

*All they have to do is send you a letter. Dear [Tony] ... .. in light of your recent referral in relation to such and such a man ... ah we have put our team of investigators on to look in to it further ... that's all you want, a bit of acknowledgement but they don't give you that, they give you nothing ...*

*It's needs to be a statutory thing, I'm not, ya know there should be a standard protocol if someone makes a report,*

*doesn't matter what age they are, that there is a support plan for the person and a support plan for the person who's receiving the information...*

*Tony*

*the only thing that'd I'd add is that there should be just basic guidelines as in like, as in I don't know, ethics, guideline towards the person who's making the complaint, who's coming to you to share something so personal that it's probably effected their lives ya know, like massively, in all shapes and forms like ya know.*

*Paul*

While reflecting on what he felt should have happened regarding making his disclosure to social work, Paul spoke about the significance of such disclosures in the context of protecting current and future children:

*I would have thought that from a HSE point of view that it would have been top priority if they though an individual was... a danger to children in the [place name] dioses... or further afield or whatever... that they would have done everything within their power to have been on it and ya know to make sure that they were taking all the right procedures and steps to make sure that ... .. there was kids that were protected and this individual was out of harm's way...*

*Paul*

### *Meaning Making*

These findings related to all levels of the adult's ecological system but play out over time and are presented by the adults in the context of looking back or reflecting on their experiences. What distinguishes these narratives from those above is that they are examples of the adults trying to make meaning out of their experience of disclosure; reflecting on issues such as why it is such a

significant event and why it impacted them so much to engage with the social work system. They therefore lie within the Chronosystem of the individual's experience. Jane, like others, reflects on the process, and shares concern for those who must go through the same and who might not possess the same level of resilience as her. Paul shares similar sentiments in the second quotation:

*very ahm worrying, I mean I'm lucky enough that I've got a good support and I've managed to, you know I think I've got fairly ok head on my shoulders to get through but fucking hell... if I had been, if I had had one foot ... on the side of a cliff and ended up in front of that.... Not them people, but that process... (Breath intake) and I relied on it... yeah.... Both feet over the cliff.*

*Jane*

*...so, from the point of view if there's young people coming forward, not that anyone should be given priority over anyone else, if there's young people coming forward you think that they'd encourage it ya know and to stop... like if I come forward when I'm thirty-four the person who abused me is probably fifty now or early fifties by me coming forward I hopefully, ya know with the help of god, am stopping him from another twenty years of abuse like... So that's the logic I use in my head like that's why they should prioritise...*

*Paul*

Tony also reflects on similar logic and wonders if his disclosure had been prioritised would this have helped in and earlier prosecution of his abuser in the courts, and how thoughts of this have stuck with him over time:

*...ya know, and I wonder ... .. had I been advised properly by the social workers in the beginning and they had took me a little bit more seriously and I had brought the case, ten years previous, would I have got a better conviction. That was in my mind all the time, the fact that I left it ten years. Ya know.*

*Tony*

Both Jane and Patrick shared contrasting yet similar sentiments when reflecting on why they expected more from their engagement with the social workers they met with. Jane speaks about how her initial impression of social workers was formed and why this led to a certain expectation about the service she was going to receive. In the second quotation Patrick reflects on his experience and wonders why certain people get in to the profession of social work:

*... sitting in the, the waiting area, it really brought home to me the context of the type of work that they do, you know, that's why that had such an impact on me, 'cause I was like wow... I was watching these tiny little children, some of them, you know they ranged from like babies to four and five-year olds...like what a fucking start in life to be brought, you know, alcoholic parents coming through the door and... I was just like these people are amazing to be doing this kind of work. So that framed ah, like I was walking in to people who, this is what they do like. So, ... I suppose I created a contrast for me in so far as I was like, like massive respect and admiration for people who do that kind of work,*

*Jane*

*... most people I was dealing with probably had degrees and masters and whatever, and you know come on... ya have to be bright enough and together enough, I no it's a professional job but still you shouldn't be getting in to it if the people are hassle... you know, and that's my, you know you shouldn't get in to designing a website if you don't like dealing with designers and cookie art people, d'you know what I mean, if you don't like art or you don't like technology, don't go there. If you don't like dealing with people who have fairly heavy issues that are like life changing and are undermining them in loads if different aspects of their life, don't get into it.*

*Patrick*

While the other participants largely focused their narratives on the experience of disclosure and the social work system, David shared a key insight into what

it is like to try and make meaning of what is going on at the time he was being abused. The first quote from David speaks about his experience walking from his home to the home of his abuser who was a grinds teacher:

*...there was days when I, there was this long road up to his house and there was a kind of intersection road and ... going up to the road I kind of just used that a free spot on the, on that road between my mother and him ... .. it's just the only place, (crying) a happy medium between the two and I used to ... go back and forth over the road all the time...*

*David*

In this second piece of narrative, David having recently found out from some other boys that his abuser, who was a teacher, had a nick name of 'Satan'. David recalls how he tried to make meaning out of this for himself at the young age at which he was being abused:

*I was making my communion on the Saturday... but I remember my face was like a tomato you know where he beat me, I have a picture of it, I'm red where he was after hitting me the first time and I was making my communion. So, that's where I remember saying to myself at the time, they were saying you're meeting god for the first time and I was going, only a few days ago I met the Devil, I remember saying to myself. And then all these years later his nickname was Satan, I just remember going at the time I met the Devil before I met God, So ah (sigh) ... ..*

*David*

Again, while not generalisable, David's narratives show the types of experiences and turmoil that individuals must overcome before they are able to disclose. Tony speaks about how the abuse affects him and what this means for people trying to come forward:

*Ya know. But for me it's there, every day I wake I wake up it's there. Now I mask it and I, it's, I'm able to, it's a scar now,*

*I'm able to deal with it. I'm a survivor, luckily enough, I was initially a victim now I'm a survivor. But I get dark days, really dark days, can't socialise, can't speak to people, can't be emotional, can't have even have me wife touch me.*

*... and then you finally get the courage up ... to tell somebody about it, somebody who you think is going to do something for you ... .. and you become a victim again ... .. you become a victim ... of... the system. And that's not changing, that's never going to change in this country.*

*Tony*

## Particular Incident Narratives

The following section presents a selection of detailed narratives shared by the adults about particular issues or events. The BNIM methodology discourages prompting or additional questions by the interviewer throughout the participants *initial* narrative response. The researcher is then allowed to ask a set of questions relating to the data shared, using the participant's own words and in the order the topics of interest arose. These Particular Incident Narratives (PINs) are sections of the adults' initial responses where they chose to express their subjective experiences in further depth and detail. PINs often take the form of stories within stories and the following is a selection that have been purposively presented here to highlight some of the key issues relating to abuse, disclosure and interactions with social work services.

The literature presented in Chapter Four discusses how disclosure is a lifelong and fluid event that plays out over the course of a person's life time. We know also from the literature that people who are affected by abuse in their childhood can disclose or try to disclose in different ways. Alaggia (2004) refers to the various forms disclosure can take, two of which being behavioural and accidental. In the following PIN, Tony presents an experience which encompasses many of the dynamics and effects of abuse including repression of memories and flashback, trigger events and occurrences of behavioural and accidental disclosure many years after the abuse. Tony describes how on a night out he came to disclose his experiences to his wife:

*I had a melt down on a night out. ... ah ... .. in [place name]. I went absolutely bananas and do you know what, it was my birthday and I was having a great night and I got a flash back and... .. security were throwing another guy out of the pub, who had done absolutely nothing wrong only he fell asleep... and I took them all on. There was four or five of them and I think I got about three before they got me. And brought me out and I got arrested and my wife came and was like 'what's going on'. And a pal, [name], who was probably*

*my best friend at the time he came and explained the situation to me wife and ah... so I made a disclosure to her then, ya know, what had happened.*

*Tony*

The lifelong effects of trauma in childhood can create turmoil and confusion within an individual's life as discussed above, those effected can struggle to make meaning out of their experiences. David presented many PINs which described such turmoil and sense of needing or trying to make meaning out of his experiences. The follow PIN has been chosen as it insightfully describes the inner struggle to rationalise what has happened and make meaning of it. David describes his inner most thoughts during a trip to Lourdes with his father:

*We went to Lourdes... and I remember going for a walk along the river with my father and the river was so calm. And I can remember I didn't know whether I wanted to jump in or, I was looking around Lourdes and I was looking for a person worse than me and I saw someone in a wheelchair and it was basically just a head and whatever was left, but there was very little there and I was there for three days and it was the third day and I said, 'you're the one, now I can leave'. And I just went for a walk with my father along the river and I didn't know whether I wanted to jump in and a calm just came over me...*

*David*

Moving on from how abuse can interact with disclosure and effect one's sense of self, Patrick describes an interaction between the effects of abuse and family dynamics. Patrick expressed concern for his nephew in this narrative piece. This is a young boy who is a son of one of his abusers and who Patrick says is soiling himself on a regular basis. Patrick attributes these issues with his

nephew's behaviour to potential abuse by his sister and draws upon his own experiences when making sense out of what he sees in his nephew:

*But like the triggers are there... and I know from having gone out with the woman who was the social worker, like if they start hearing of soiling and things like this going on, the antennas are up they're out looking for other stuff, so I'm going that's not usual it's not like he wet the bed because he had a big football match or an exam or something ya know and then you can go 'ah yeah' or 'he drank far too much lemonade and didn't brush his teeth' and you know, it's not that, this is like a regular thing that like they even make jokes about it. One of the little fellas ahm... who still needs help to wipe his bum and they're kind of shaming him over it... .. do you know what I mean and ahm they also they made [Sister's husband], [Sister]'s husband go in to toilet with him and wipe his bum for him because he just couldn't do it properly, 'ah he's a dirty little boy' and all this, and I was like that's not helping the little fella... and those things sound, not petty but they sound almost too erstwhile compared to something very graphic, but guys this is big stuff and I've hit a brick wall saying look come here and got frustrated and I've been shouted at and been dismissed ... when I raise it the guys would say 'what the fuck would you know I'm his mother, I'm his parent' or whatever 'I know what's going on here' blah blah blah, and I'd say look this isn't good there's something else going on there*

*Patrick*

The above incidents shared by the participants depict the deeply personal effects and potential consequences of an experience of abuse in childhood, on oneself and their surrounding social circles. In this next particular incident Jane shares her experience of social work services and their wider remit of child protection. While a small extract of this piece fell under the finding on 'Environment' this fuller narrative provides rich detail of Jane's own experience of waiting to meet a social worker to make her disclosure:

*...there was a lot of distressed young children coming in and out, there was a lot of ... activity with kids... I didn't know what it was, it just felt like, like they were there with foster parents or something, and, the kids were, there were loads, like there was a whole kind of ... world going on there. It was really sad, I just felt like it was really, it was really, really sad, whatever it was, whatever part of the HSE unit I was sitting in, which I still don't know to this day, which is...there was a lot of commotion, a lot of stress, a lot of upset and these children were small and they clearly weren't with their parents and I remember saying to [advocacy worker] like 'what, what's going in this, what, what's that, what's wrong with that little boy' and her just making a total assumption, she was like 'I don't know, my guess is these are social workers, these kids are very distressed cause maybe they're'...and then an alcoholic couple came in and... it was just sad like I don't feel bad for me that I had to be exposed to it, I just felt it was just, it was just really sad...*

*Jane*

Finally, this PIN taken from the interview with Paul demonstrates that while disclosure can take many forms so can the response to such a disclosure. Here Paul demonstrates how important the response to disclosure can be for someone who has experienced abuse and highlights behaviours, language and practical issues that caused him to have a negative experience of disclosing to social workers:

*I thought I was a little bit disrespected and you know it wasn't taken seriously when she cancelled the first time like, and it was a little bit willy nilly like ya know ... ahm ... so ... I met her in the place and it was ah... it was [place name] and a hotel, the [hotel name] I met her, that was the first place we were supposed to meet as well ... but ahm ... when I walked in, she said oh, she text me to say ahm, think she said we're over in the corner, yeah, we're over in the corner ... and that was before ahm I got out of the car... so again I kind of said 'god, how many people am I walking in to here', like ya know... So... ah that made me, I was anxious then walking in like and I was getting a bit nervous*

*or whatever, so when I walked in she said where they were and there was two of them there, herself and another girl and ahm ... so I went over and I sat down and she introduced me, and the other girl she was with was absolutely lovely but still I don't know what her purpose was there, it was like maybe they, she was accompanying her as ... a colleague that they had two separate bits of business and she said ah sure you may as well come along to this as well ... they were drinking coffee there as well and I don't know, it was ... .. now I'm looking back I'm kind of saying god (laugh) like ... I would like to think myself if, I wouldn't have brought someone in to that situation or environment knowing that ... what they were going to possibly disclose to me and I sat down with [social worker] and the other girl who was with her and there was people behind us having dinner and it was just a close bar, pub bar... .. hotel bar, there was kids running around and .... .. [social worker] didn't really go in to any detail about ... thankfully she didn't really ask me any, you know, intimate details about what happened or whatever but she did use ... really like ... the language she used, anyone that was sitting close to us like and I'm like pretty sure people who probably heard the language she was using would have been in no doubt that I was like sexually abuse as a child...*

*Paul*

## Summary

This chapter has provided the main research findings under the following central themes; The Adult, Disclosure, Interaction, Information, Social Work and Reflection. The findings were presented within an ecological framework. While not all themes and sub-themes neatly fit into the individual spheres Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, the model provided a useful framework within which to view the findings. Initially findings were presented in respect of the adult themselves, their experiences of abuse, co-morbidities and personal and family dynamics at play. The chapter then presented findings in respect of the adults' experience of disclosure and interacting with their close and wider social and societal structures, including the barriers and facilitators they experienced when coming forward. This led us on to their interaction with State services where findings were presented in respect of what the adults' experiences were of this and what information they received or did not receive a part of this process. Findings in respect of the process and wider system itself were then presented under the main theme of 'Social Work'; including some key findings regarding professional competency and process. Finally, we move to the chronosystem, where the adults presented narratives in respect of their reflection upon their experiences; looking back and making meaning. The chapter concludes with a small example of Particular Incident Narratives that highlight some of the overarching experiences of adults affected by childhood sexual abuse. Chapter Seven will discuss these findings with reference to the literature.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion**

### Introduction

Child protection policy and law in Ireland obliges those who have information regarding child abuse or neglect to report such information to the authorities. Those authorities are the State police (An Garda Síochána) and State Child Protection and Welfare services (Tusla). As part of this legal and policy mechanism adults who have disclosed experiences of childhood abuse are channelled through the State child protection services where assessment and investigation of their disclosures is conducted. This usually occurs following disclosure elsewhere to a counsellor, therapist or during legal proceedings. Findings from this research show that it also occurs due to a wish on the adult's part to ensure that no further children come to harm from the abuser identified in their disclosure. Whatever the reason, adults are channelled through a system that is designed to engage with children and families and, while staffed with personnel who are skilled and qualified in child-centred practices, this research highlights the consequences and impact of poor management of such disclosures made by adults. Reports by HIQA, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Government, analysed as part of this research, show that the current system is, at best, not taking sufficient account of adults coming forward to disclose childhood sexual abuse and at worst failing them. While it is important that new policies and practices should learn from such reports it is also imperative that any developments are informed by the experiences of those who have gone through the process of disclosure to child protection services in Ireland.

Despite the small sample used in this study much of the findings replicate and echo the existing literature in the field of disclosure scholarship. Using BNIM, the participants have offered an in-depth account of their experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to social work services. The accounts

contained in this research represent the depth of understanding, insight and emotion that is accessible via narrative inquiry and the huge resource that individual lived experience presents.

The main objectives of this study were, a) to examine what the facilitators and barriers are for adults disclosing to social work services; b) to examine if services take account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced abuse in their childhoods and; c) to present policy and practice recommendations informed by the findings of this study. This chapter will discuss the findings of this research under these three objectives highlighting where the research has replicated and reinforced existing work and highlighting key findings where it has added knowledge to the field, under the headings 'Contributions to the Field'.

**Aim 1: What are the facilitators and barriers for adults making disclosures of childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services?**

This study is the first of its kind, in an Irish context, to chart facilitators and barriers for adults disclosing childhood sexual abuse. The facilitators and barriers identified in this study complement the existing research in that they range from personal to inter-personal, to wider macro factors that affect an adult's decision, ability or opportunity to disclose their experiences; supporting the perspective of disclosure as a deeply personal, inter-relational and socio-cultural phenomenon (Alaggia, 2010; Hunter, 2011; Easton, 2013, Tener and Murphy, 2015). Acknowledging the range of such facilitators and barriers, this study charted and presented the findings within an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While this is not a novel approach to examining disclosure (Alaggia, 2010, Collin-Vézina et al., 2015) it has not been utilised previously in the context of disclosure to social work services, nationally or

internationally. The research bears specific learning in terms of the impact of social work policy and practice on those who have experienced childhood trauma. This study therefore has applied an existing approach to a relatively new phenomenon in Irish social work.

This research reinforces existing research by establishing that those who experience sexual abuse in childhood face multiple internal and external barriers across the lifecourse and throughout the various layers of the ecological system. The research demonstrates this by taking one point of interaction as its focus; the disclosure to social work services. The practice of social workers receiving and assessing adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse is a relatively recent phenomenon in Irish social work. The Children First guidelines, launched in 1999 (Department of Health and Children, 1999), were the first policy recognition of this role and since this time problematic issues and inconsistencies have been identified in a plethora of fora and reports as mentioned above. It is clear from the findings that we can trace the impact of policy and guidance at a macro level down through local services and staff to impact not only on the adult in their microsystem (their inner most social circles) but that affect them on a very basic ontogenic level, their very core. This research shows the importance of social workers understanding the adult as an individual affected by childhood abuse and the need for environments and processes that facilitate, encourage and support disclosure of childhood abuse.

Regarding barriers and facilitators, the existing research presented in Chapter Three shows the multiple and lifelong effects of abuse not only in the adult's internal psychological being but also in how they interact with their world. The established, possible, effects of alcoholism, substance misuse, relationship breakdown and poor labour market uptake as well as difficulty in trusting others and issues with authority and control are all echoed in this research and support the existing national and international research.

The participants of this study discussed many barriers to disclosure which operated in their micro level systems. Family dynamics arose as a prominent

barrier to disclosure. Most of the participants shared views in respect of either following their family's instruction to go forward and disclose (Jane), not wishing to upset their family and break up their entire social structure and therefore choosing not to disclose (Tony) right down to those who did not realise they had suffered abuse until almost forty years after the events and then not disclosing due to familial care obligations and lack of capacity to deal appropriately with what might follow a disclosure (David). The literature in this area suggests that trust, loyalty and power can impact upon individual's decisions to disclose (Mian et al., 1986; Alaggia and Kirshenbaum, 2005; Reitsema and Grietens, 2016; Anderson, 2016). Given the prevalence of intra-familial abuse, this research establishes the need for child protection social workers to be conscious of the possible family dynamics at play and how they may act as facilitators and barriers for the adult. Knowledge and awareness of such dynamics may enable the social worker to reduce the adults' levels of anxiety or stress regarding a family member finding out about the disclosure or emphasise the need for the adult to know when a specific family member would be contacted as part of an assessment. Findings from this study support the need to keep the adult up to date regarding the progress of such assessments, identify who will be contacted and what the extent of the assessment will be, especially where the disclosure relates to intra-familial abuse.

Gender as a mediating factor within the process of disclosure is evident from the research literature discussed in this thesis (see as an example Hunter, 2010; Stoltenborough et al, 2011; Alaggia, 2010). The sample breakdown within this research was four to one, male to female and while much of the research literature tends to draw upon predominantly female population samples the findings of some studies examining male experiences of disclosure are echoed here. Fear of being labelled as homosexual, fear of stigmatisation and fear of going on to perpetrate sexual abuse (Alaggia, 2005) all arose within the narratives shared by the males participating in this research. In addition to family dynamics more generally, mentioned above, strong, authoritative or strict gender roles within families also arose as features within some of the narratives,

particularly Patrick's experiences. While gender arose as a feature throughout, due to the small sample size and specific focus of the research it is not possible to authoritatively comment of the role of gender in respect of issues concerning substantiation of abuse by services (Collin Vézina et al 2013), latency to disclosure (Alaggia, 2010) or the sense of being believed or differentiated reactions from social workers (Alaggia, 2005; Dorahy and Clearwater, 2012; Ullman and Filipas, 2005); more research in this specific area is warranted and recommended.

Disclosure is a dynamic and life-long process. Alaggia (2004) building on the work of Sorenson and Snow (1991), Campis et al (1993), Keary and Fitzpatrick (1994) and Mian et al (1986) spoke about the different forms that disclosure may take including purposeful, elicited/prompted, accidental, behavioural, purposefully withheld and triggered. These forms are reemphasised here in this study ranging from triggered (Tony fighting/David TV), purposively withheld (David looking after father/Tony not telling Gardaí), Purposeful (Patrick) to elicited/prompted (Jane/Paul). Disclosure is a dialogical and inter-personal process, and this emphasises the need for services to actively seek out disclosure with the significance of simply asking about abuse being highlighted in the literature including the SAVI study (2002) in an Irish context. Before disclosing, individuals require a certain level of intimacy to feel comfortable sharing their story and to do so they will look for a safe a trusted space (Tener and Murphy, 2015; Del Castillo and Wright, 2009; Chouliara et al., 2011). A feature that presented as a barrier to disclosure in this study was where many of the adults reflected upon their wishes not to overburden those who may potentially receive the information relating to their experiences. This must be viewed alongside most of the participants experiencing the engagement with social work as 'cold' and sharing doubts about the competency and experience of the social workers. Given the established issues regarding trust (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986), respect for authority (Hunter, 2010) and low rates of disclosures to authorities such as police or protection services (Leventhal, 1998)

it is critical that social work services create such safe and welcoming spaces for adults; physically and mentally.

While the adults in this study provide learning in terms of a sense of overburdening and trying to tell, they also highlight the well-established significance of the reaction to disclosure. We know that the perceived, received or anticipated reaction to disclosure can be critical in terms of future trauma or future decisions to disclose (Tener and Murphy, 2015; Jonzon and Lindblad, 2004; Easton, 2013). Finkelhor specifically notes that his four-stage traumagenic model applies not only to the abusive experience itself but also in terms of a reaction to disclosure and the ‘ongoing process’ (Finkelhor, 1987, p538) with such reactions potentially creating the same dynamics and effects as that of the abusive experience itself (Alaggia et al, 2017; Sarsoli et al, 2008; Spaccarelli, 1994). We see this replicated in this study with many adults receiving negative reactions to their disclosures from both social work services and elsewhere. Issues regarding delays in reply following disclosure, insufficient information and negative reactions on an inter-personal level during interaction with social work all had direct effects on the adults who participated in this study. Tony went ‘in to a rage’ after a social worker didn’t turn up to meet him and didn’t call first to cancel. Patrick stated that he wouldn’t have come forward to social workers in the first place if he had known what the process was like and what delays were in store. These findings highlighting the extent to which reactions can act as a potential barrier to disclosures or further engagement. Another finding of this study, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is that the lack of a competent response by the social worker, possibly due to lack of experience in some cases, fed in to this negative reaction to the adult’s disclosure; how was their story going to be handled or treated?

As noted above, Finkelhor’s four stage traumagenic model also relates to the effects caused by disclosure. The stages of this model were also evident in the data collected as part of this research. Because the focus of the research was on disclosure as opposed to the abusive experiences themselves, and adults were

not asked directly about their experiences of abuse, the stage of traumatic sexualisation did not arise as prominently as the other three. That said, issues regarding sexual identity as a consequence of an experience of abuse in childhood did arise within the sample. Therefore, apart from traumatic sexualisation, Finkelhor's (1985) stages of Stigmatisation, Betrayal and Powerlessness are all evident within the findings of this research.

### *Contribution to the field: The System as a Barrier*

Working from a social constructionist stance this thesis takes the view that social work practice, policy and law is socially, politically and culturally mediated. This is no more apparent than in the area of child sexual abuse in Ireland. Ireland's failings in respect of responding to and addressing concerns of intra and extra-familial and clerical and institutional abuses of children are well documented (See Ferns (2005), Murphy (2009), Ryan (2009), Roscommon (2010) and Monageer (2008) Reports (See also Holohan, 2011, for a comprehensive overview). Such failings feed in to a culture of silence and mistrust of the authorities charged with responding to and protecting against such abuses. The remnants of 'Catholic Ireland' fed in to social work policy and practice in this area with a taboo surrounding sex and sexuality having the effect of child sexual abuse not being recognised in Irish child protection policy until 1987 (O'Sullivan IN O'Mahony, 2002) with recognition of an adult population effected by such abuses not recognised in policy until 1999 (Department of Health and Children, 1999) following an avalanche of abuse inquiries, allegations and high-profile legal cases.

Despite this recognition, the State continued not to fully accept and acknowledge this population with denial of compensation to some victims (See Louise O'Keefe Case, ECHR 027 (2014)), reduction of funding to adult therapeutic services such as the Rape Crisis Network (RTÉ News, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017) and abolishing of a planned monument to victims and survivors of State

and institutional abuse in 2017 (Irish Examiner, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017). The silencing effect of such societal and political features is compounded and reinforced when the system, through which adults are channelled, is also found to be lacking in its recognition, support and encouragement of those individuals affected by childhood abuse. The recent Taking Stock Report (2017), which focused on the management of retrospective disclosures by the child protection services, highlighted ‘poor administration’, undue delays, poor communication and lack of training and supports for staff (2017, pp 7-11). Such issues were also highlighted by the author in previous research in this area (Mooney, 2014). What this research adds to the area is a confirmation of these issues but, more so, details of the possible effects they have on individuals affected by childhood abuse; their experiences of such a system. Azzopardi et al, (2017) note that the ‘sheer magnitude of multilevel ecological influences, the complexity of the inter-relationships among them, and the changing disposition of transactional effects do not lend themselves well to sound quantitative measurement’ (2017, p12). In combining the existing evidence regarding the system via which adults make disclosures of childhood abuse and the newly gathered narrative data as to how this impacts upon such adults, a main contribution to the field from this research is that the child protection system itself acts as a barrier to disclosing childhood trauma and abuse.

Child protection social workers work with issues such as attachment, trauma and psychological harm and violence on a regular basis and are trained and qualified to do so. It is therefore a corollary of this finding that it is not just the social workers themselves that are contributing to such a poor response to adults who are disclosing but the policy, political and legal environment in which such disclosures take place; the system itself acts as the primary barrier. Kenneth Gergen provides us with an optic which we can adapt to view social work inaction in respect of adult disclosures of abuse and an argument against ‘scapegoating’ individual social work practice. He suggests that because we believe in self-contained individuals, we also inherit a handy way of understanding bad action, we suspect the fault lies in internal functioning.

Individuals cause problems and individuals must be repaired. He poses the question ‘Does anyone’s action entirely originate with the self – independent of any history or circumstance. It is argued in this thesis that a lack of policy and guidance in respect of engaging with adults effected by abuse stems from an historic lack of attention to issues regarding sexual abuse in Ireland. It also stems, politically and historically, from adult’s being outside of the child protection system and so the system can easily ‘other’ and re-prioritise such adults.

That said, there are also data from the adult participants of this study that highlight specific interpersonal failings on the part of individual social workers who met with the adults. The first note of social work’s responsibility for adult disclosures is to be found in the 1999 version of the Children First National Guidance. However, social work’s responsibility to respond to child protection concerns in general was laid down 8 years previous within the Child Care Act 1991. Child protection social work in Ireland is therefore in a unique legal environment in that its role in assessing and receiving adult disclosures of childhood abuse was never foreseen under the legislation that provides it with the statutory authority to assess risk and concern for children’s welfare. The duty to assess adult disclosures has therefore been retrospectively granted legal authority under Section 3 of the Act. This ‘legal glitch’ has created a situation whereby under policy, social workers are obliged to accept such referrals, but under statute they have no specific powers to do so. A suite of legal precedent has added some clarity in this area but it seems that without legislative authority the child protection services are hesitant to proactively assess adult disclosures due to fear of suit. A system with ample training, legislation and policy could overcome these barriers and this will be discussed later under final part of this chapter.

Social work as a profession is facing staffing and resource shortages in recent years in Ireland. Many of the social work responses in respect of adult disclosures have been in the context of such shortages, longer waiting lists, and

a complex legal process which surrounds retrospective disclosures due to the competing legal rights of the victim and perpetrator. As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, it is argued that the complex legal environment has also led to defensive social work practice and policy in this area with fear of suit being high on the agenda. The participants of this study said that they felt that social workers could not acknowledge what they were disclosing as true due to the fear of being sued. Patrick spoke about the need for social workers to be able to do this job without ‘watching their pockets’ and that there are ways of dealing with the disclosure “without always looking to see who’s going to bring you to court”. Jane shared a sense of frustration about this factor, saying that while not needing to acknowledge that it’s ‘true’, the social workers could have acknowledged that Jane hadn’t made it all up. This potential legal complexity within social work practice fed in to issues around belief and trust of authority for the adults coming forward. This is significant due to what we know about the impact of childhood sexual abuse in later life. Difficulty trusting others, issues with authority, shame, guilt and fear of not being believed are all potentially daily experiences for adults impacted by childhood abuse. This research shows that in addition to these effects, the act of handing over such sensitive information, a life story, to a system that may not treat it appropriately is a significant issue and potential barrier. While all participants had engaged with social work services, many reflected on the fact that they would not have done so if they had known what their experience was going to be like. Sanderson (2006) speaks about how adults affected by childhood abuse exert much of their energy retaining control, it is noteworthy that many of the participants of this study saw the process of disclosure to social work as just that; handing over their story.

One of key facilitating factors which drove the participants of this study to engage with social work services was the desire to protect current and future children. The participants of this study saw their disclosure in the context of the child protection process, with some seeing themselves almost as secondary. Some of the adults spoke about making their disclosure for this very reason,

while others saw this as the function of their disclosure once they engaged with the social work system. Irrespective, the adults shared a sense of wanting to protect children from the harm that they experienced. However, the adults who participated in this study shared a sense awareness that adult disclosures were not the main stay of child protection social work. The narratives of the adult participants possibly suggest that social workers, skilled in child-centred practices and systems, perhaps found it difficult when presented with adults dealing with the lifelong effects of childhood abuse; further research in respect of social workers experiences of receiving such disclosures is warranted in this regard. Issues arose regarding the social workers' competency or experience in dealing with adult disclosures and sexual abuse in general. This is also evidenced in the various investigation reports presented by HIQA and the Office of the Ombudsman. Investigations such as these highlighted long delays in dealing with adults' disclosures, referrals not being assessed in some instances and poor levels of communication with the adult's coming forward. The adults in this study experienced some or all of these features.

We therefore see a whole-system impact upon the adults coming forward to disclose. This begins with the socially constructed nature of our societal attitudes and laws and policies, originally assuming a predominantly catholic ethos, leading to an absence of adult disclosures from statute law instead being dealt with within child protection policy frameworks leading to adults being obliged to engage with essentially child-centred services. This 'legal glitch', as called above, has further resulted in a lack of attention by those child-centred services to the issue of adult disclosures as they are somewhat 'outside' their remit as one adult participant put it. This lack of legal and policy development and attention has led to a lack of training, awareness and knowledge within frontline services of issues such as long-term effects of abuse, adult disclosures and lifecourse dynamic of abuse and disclosure. This ultimately has resulted in the types of experiences relayed in the narratives of the adults who took part in this study and highlights this as a system failure and not one of individual practice.

Irrespective of whether the root causes of such inadequacies are within the remit of the frontline practitioner, the wider agency offering child protection services or at the macro level of policy development or law, the consequence is an impact upon an individual who may not wish to be there in the first place (Jane) to one who is re-living their abusive experiences prior to meeting with a social worker (Tony). These effects are established consequences of an abusive experience in childhood and can serve as barriers when faced with a system that at best confuses and frustrates adults and at worst, replicates the dynamics of abuse itself. In addition to this it is important that the system as it stands takes note of the finding that these same adults continued their engagement due to their wish to safeguard current and future children. In a field that consistently reemphasises the need to research facilitators to disclosure this is a significant finding of this research.

**Aim 2: How does the current disclosure process within the child protection system and its underlying policies take account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced child sexual abuse?**

As discussed above, one of the central findings of this research is that while many facilitators and barriers exist in relation to the disclosure of childhood sexual abuse the social work system itself, it's policies, laws and practice serve as a barrier for adults coming forward to share their experiences; ultimately to protect current and future children. The literature tells us that a large proportion of those who experience abuse in childhood do not disclose until adulthood (Alaggia, 2005) with a mean of 3-18 years delay (Alaggia, 2010) and an unknown proportion who do not disclose at all. In addition to this, the literature has established that disclosure increases as children age towards 18. There is therefore evidence to suggest that we should expect more disclosure from adults, if at all (Alaggia, Collin-Vézina and Lateef, 2017). This being the case our systems, policies and laws should be geared towards facilitating,

encouraging and supporting disclosure in adulthood as well as childhood (McElvaney, 2015). Following the charting of facilitators and barriers in the Irish social work system it was a key objective of this study to examine if and how the current system takes account of the specific needs of adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood. Again, it is important to bear in mind that while the effects of abuse experienced by the participants of this study are echoed in the existing literature the experiences and subsequent learnings are not generalisable but are instructive and informative.

Spaccarelli (1994), Hunter (2011) and Alaggia (2005) have established that the dynamics of abuse can be replicated in disclosure and that the experience of disclosure can be as significant as that of the abuse itself. Finkelhor's Four-Stage Traumagenic Model also accounts for this feature, calling it the 'on-going process' (1985). This feature was replicated and presented by the adults who took part in this study. Experiences of intense anxiety, drug and alcohol use, anger, distress and fear were presented as consequences of disclosing to social work services or because of the lead up to meeting with social workers. The result of receiving an initial letter from social work, preparing for an interview with a social worker or knowing basic details such as how many social workers will attend and where an interview will be held may have higher significance for an adult due to the trauma they have experienced. Paul spoke about receiving a text message prior to meeting to disclose to social workers in a hotel bar. The message was directing Paul to where the social workers were sitting and stated, "we are over in the corner", referring to the location in the hotel bar. Paul placed emphasis on the "we" in this message and extrapolated that he was meeting more than one social worker; a detail of which, up to this point, he was not aware.

Many of these experiences shared by the adults in this study related to a loss of control or a powerlessness on their part which could have been overcome by clearer communication from the social workers. As the profession responsible for assessing adult disclosures of abuse, social workers need to be cognisant of

these features so that their communications and interactions can be informed by the potential needs of the adults, given their experiences. While an understanding of the initial and long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse is essential when working with children and adults who have experienced such abuse it is also critical that there is an understanding of the dynamics and effects of disclosure including the barriers and facilitators that are at play. Such an approach could be viewed as Trauma Informed Care which is an approach that incorporates an understanding of trauma, the person-in-environment, the return of control to the adult and creation of safety (Wilson, Pence and Conradi, 2013).

This research has evidenced that greater attention needs to be paid to the dynamics of abuse, trauma and disclosure and how these interact and play out over the life-course. We have seen that while a majority do not disclose until adulthood those who do disclose in childhood do so closer to the age of 18 and therefore it is argued that such an understanding of disclosure/abuse dynamics must include a life course perspective placing disclosure and abuse on the same trajectory and not viewing them as sequential but fluid experiences that play out over the course of a life. Alaggia et al (2017) have highlighted the need for disclosure scholarship to take a life course approach. Taking a life course perspective of abuse and disclosure, as this research does, allows us to plot both features, abuse and disclosure, side by side as they develop through an adult's life. A key example of this is the feature of 'reaction to disclosure' as discussed above, and how such reactions can re-create the effects and impacts of abuse. While established in the research this study adds new knowledge and establishes this as a feature of the current Irish social work system and its policy and practice approach towards adults effected by childhood trauma. The issues of delay, lack of information and clarity and poor interpersonal contact experiences all serve to potentially re-create such dynamics and cause further harm and trauma to those adults coming forward and potentially discourage and silence those adults yet to disclose.

### *Contribution to the Field: Power*

While not novel to examine power in the context of childhood sexual abuse (see Hanisch and Moulding, 2011; Death, 2013; Bell, 2011; Hagan and Smail, 1997) this research identified power as an overarching theme that impacted upon all facets of the disclosure to social work services. The research incorporates power as a central component within its theoretical framework with an emphasis on Foucault's perspective on power as that which is resultant from relationships. The research also highlights examples of such power in the context of identified sub-themes pertaining to issues such as control, delay, the environment, language, belief and uncertainty. Power is a difficult to define and contested concept that has garnered many perspectives. Haugaard and Clegg (2013) and Haugaard and Ryan (2012) encourage us to look at theories of power like a family, with different perspectives and viewpoints. They base their analysis of power around concepts such as 'power to' and 'power over', with Amy Allen (1998) emphasising 'power with', focusing on the collaborative nature of the relationship. McGregor (2016) provides a useful synopsis of power suggesting that it is multi-directional, non-linear and is neither good nor bad, and urges us to consider Stanley Cohen's theorisation that power exists in all places in different levels and to different degrees (Cohen, 1985). This concept of power existing in all places is also adopted by Foucault; power is everywhere. Foucault's later theorisation speaks of power as oppressive, specifically discussing the rule of law, government authority and examining power in terms of the forms of resistance to it (1982). However, adopting a 'toolbox' approach to Foucault, as he himself has suggested, this thesis lays emphasis on his earlier theorisations of power as being something resultant from relationships.

It is argued in this thesis that power mediates the relationship between the social worker and the adult who is disclosing and that this relationship is

impacted by power relationships that play out across all ecological levels. These impacts may take the form of policy obligations to report; official correspondence with the adult by letter or phone; official interview meetings to provide a disclosure and the environment in which these meetings take place; lack of detail or delay in follow up or provision of information; family dynamics that play out at the time of the abusive experience and presently and any and all co-morbidities that may affect the adult who comes forward, whether directly or indirectly connected to the abusive experience. It is therefore argued that to assist service users, social work services must understand how adults have come to be engaged with social work services (Tew 2006). This makes an argument for the understanding of experiences of abuse and how individuals come to disclose or not disclose (i.e. facilitators and barriers). The research tells us that experiences of abuse can be replicated in the experience of disclosure (Alaggia, 2005, Hunter 2011, Spaccarelli, 1994) and therefore such an understanding must include an understanding of disclosure in particular. We have seen how the effects of abuse can echo and remain in to adulthood, sometimes not being felt or experienced until adulthood (Beitchman et al 1992). An understanding of power is therefore critical to developing an understanding of the needs of the service user.

The specific dynamics of power presented by the adults in this study varied and highlighted many features of the interaction with social work services. Influenced by the work of Foucault, the analysis of power in this study included an examination of the relationships within which such power occurred (adult/social worker, adult/State, adult/family, adult/society). The various 'locations' of such power relations were mapped on to an ecological framework to assist in the understanding of the interplay between and within relationships of power. Other theorisations were used to examine specific relationships such as the use of ethics of care to further interrogate and understand the relationship between adult and social worker and the use of social constructionism to examine and understand how societal discourses and wider societal and cultural

mechanisms such as law and policy can impact upon the individual. It is illustrative to examine some of the examples of such analysis.

Many of the adults spoke about a lack of information being provided to them prior to and following their disclosure to social work services. Many of the adults linked this lack of information to issues regarding control, with one participant plainly stating that one way to control a person is to revoke or withhold information from them (Jane). The sense of frustration and powerlessness that impacted upon the adults because of such a lack of information is evident from the findings of this research and specifically within the context of family dynamics. (Paul who hadn't yet told his family and worried that a social worker from his local area might tell them; Patrick, when visiting his mother, checking the road leading in to his mother's home in case his abusers (his sisters) had been informed by social work). This research establishes that poor clarity, communication and information also fed in to issues regarding feeling believed and uncertainty about what was happening their disclosure and more specifically about how their disclosure would be used.

Two specific examples of the consequences of such a power dynamic within these relationships were emphasised by the participants of this research. They shared similar sentiments about entering a void follow their disclosure, with one participant equating the experience to pulling a pin on a grenade and then waiting; emphasising the heightened, stressful state that this left him in. While the metaphors and analogies varied from a grenade, to a void and from falling off a cliff to entering a black hole, they all were used in respect of this period and experience following the disclosure to social work services. This also occurred following the provision of, what the participants felt were, detailed statements of their experiences of abuse. Many of the participants spoke about feeling anger and frustration at social workers not accepting such statements as sufficient and requiring the adult to redisclose and add more detail. The focus of this study is the interaction between adult and social worker during what the

study has called the 'point of disclosure'. The point of disclosure encapsulates a relationship of power on multiple levels; social, cultural, law, policy and practice. It is also a relationship where knowledge is created; the transfer of a narrative of abuse into information used to assess child protection concerns. Foucault wrote at length about the power/knowledge dynamic. It is useful here to examine the disclosure process through such a power/knowledge dynamic. Chapter two flagged Foucault's concept of 'the confessional' and it is important to discuss this further as analogous to the mechanism of disclosure to social work.

Foucault describes the confessional as not just an act, mechanism or place but as a process, 'a ritual of discourse'. In this ritual the adult (the speaking subject) is also the subject of the disclosure (the statement). Foucault also speaks about this as a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship. He would suggest that an adult does not disclose without the presence (or virtual presence) of the authority who requires disclosure. In this instance this relates to the social worker or workers who are physically present in the room during the disclosure but also the 'virtual' presence of reporting laws and policy, obliging the adult to be present and to disclose. It is via this 'authority' that social workers request further detail from the adults to carry out their assessments. Or as Foucault put it, the social worker 'prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile' (Foucault, 1976, p61-62). This process is similar to the social work process of risk assessment, deciding the priority of an adult's disclosure, and assessing credibility. All of which can lead to significant issues regarding belief and trust for the adult. This research highlights the lack of reconciliation for the adults who engaged with social work, in that most never found out what occurred with the information they shared.

Foucault's theorisation of the confessional also bears similarity to the 're-traumatisation' element of disclosure where he says that the 'expression alone... produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it'

(Foucault, 1976, p62). The very act of disclosing, as we know from existing research, can cause re-traumatisation. This study also highlights the significance of the lead up to making such a disclosure. This is a part of the process of disclosure that must also be considered when assessing power dynamics and the specific needs of adults coming forward. Foucault specifically references this process as a relationship of power in which ‘the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks, but in the one who listens’ (Foucault, 1976, p62). This re-emphasises the importance of Tew’s comments on the power that social workers hold in relation to service users and the need for social workers ‘to help people to develop a greater understanding of the power relations that may impact on their lives’ (2006, p36); a development of collaboration or ‘power with’. Tew suggests that ‘invitations to co-operate and work alongside may potentially allow shifts from entrenched identities (such as ‘expert’ or ‘victim’), and start to undermine social constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (2006, p43). The participants of this study suggested that better communication and clear information regarding timelines and process would have eased much of this, already inherently, stressful situation. This is a key example of where the social worker could exercise ‘power with’ (Allen, 1998) and collaborate with and inform the adult, thereby empowering them in terms of the process and reducing their anxiety and stress. However, none of the adults experienced such collaborative practice. Power can be theorised as resultant from relationships and need not be intentionally invoked by a party (Foucault, 1976; Allen, 1998). Without interviewing the social workers in these individual cases, it is impossible to say whether such lack of clarity and information was purposeful or a result of wider policy and legal obligations or failings. Previous research by the author (Mooney 2014, 2017) suggests that it is a wider issue, however this is cold comfort to the adults who wish to disclose.

A final aspect which emerged from this research, and has heretofore garnered no research, is the issue of the environment in which the adult makes their disclosure. This falls outside of the policy and interpersonal aspect of power but

nonetheless the adults' relationship to their environment creates a certain dynamic of power. This research establishes that this was a significant issue for all the participants of this study and included not just the physical environment but also who was present during the disclosure. While all the participants referenced the benefit of having their advocacy officer present, they also spoke about the apprehension leading up to the initial interview with social work regarding how many social workers would be present at the interview. Lack of clarity regarding this factor led to unnecessary stress for the adults coming forward and is an aspect that could easily be countered with clear information.

The setting in which the interview with social work took place was another feature which contributed to the power dynamics. Interview settings ranged from a 'standard' social work office in the adult's local area, to a playroom setting, to a hotel bar. Paul felt the need to 'lean in' to the social worker he met with to get her to lower her voice when discussing his disclosure in a hotel bar. Jane felt it strange that she was interviewed in a children's playroom, highlighting the replication of the dynamics around the age and environment (school) in which she was abused. The research therefore highlights the need to clearly outline to an adult where and when a meeting will take place, who will be present and that such details should take in to account what is known about the adult's experience from any preceding information and be informed by the research and theory regarding disclosure and sexual abuse in general. This echoes Alaggia's research which emphasises the need for professionals to 'inquire about reasons for withholding, all attempts to tell, responses following disclosure, and consequences of telling' (2010, p38). Having knowledge of such issues and understanding the power dynamics potentially at play within them, will assist the professional in understanding the adult's life experience of disclosure and how the adult may be experiencing the current iteration of disclosure. The incorporation of a life course and ecological framework including theories of power, social constructionism and ethics of care has developed from this research as a starting point to address such issues.

While this collection of theories has not been used together previously to examine disclosure it is argued that a unique contribution of this research lies in its use of a life course perspective to examine how these components influence ‘trajectory’ or ‘the chronosystem’ of an adult who discloses to social work services. Each experience of abuse and disclosure causes ripple effects within the individual’s life and that of their environment. This thesis examines one such point, the act of disclosure to social work services. On examination of this point it is then possible to populate the socio-ecological environment surrounding such an experience, the wider factors that inform an experience of this nature and the power that acts upon, and is resultant from, such an experience and its ripple effect through the life-course.

This thesis is ultimately a study of interpersonal relations, a meeting between adult and social worker and the theorisation of power, as something resultant from relationships, is key to examining this phenomenon. Using a life course perspective in combination with the ecological framework, as Bronfenbrenner and Elder would suggest, also allows us to chart the various instances of power that impact upon the phenomenon being studied. We can chart the effects of childhood sexual abuse in to adulthood, the macro, societal and historical effect of our attitudes and beliefs about child abuse over time and how these are sometimes reflected in our policies or lack thereof (with child sexual abuse not appearing until 1987 and retrospective disclosures not appearing until 1999). We can also chart the interplay of family dynamics, stigma, shame and guilt which can silence and ‘other’ an adult who has experienced abuse and how these play out within the macro, exo, meso and micro spheres. We specifically can use the frame to focus on the interaction between adult and social worker, an interaction it is argued, occurs within and between the meso and exo layers and which can be more closely examined via an ethics of care theorisation.

Aim 3: What are the policy recommendations that can inform social work practice in this area?

Unfortunately, this research has found that the experience of adults disclosing childhood sexual abuse to social work services in Ireland is predominantly negative. This is not uncommon in respect of disclosure of childhood sexual abuse generally (Alaggia et al, 2017). The somewhat unique legal and policy environment in Ireland has contributed to this and recommendations in this respect, influenced by the findings of this research and existing literature, are explored later in this section. As part of the narratives provided by the adults they inevitably proffered some recommendations; including further clarity regarding the process and timelines of assessment; clearer information at all points; and improved communication and transparency. The adults also flagged some more specific areas which could be examined including the need for a single process, provision of one disclosure and statutory backing for social work assessments in this area.

Given what we know about abuse and disclosure, it is clear that disclosure needs to be facilitated, encouraged and supported in a caring and understanding environment. This research has shown that issues such as competency, physical and personnel environment and responses and reactions to disclosure added to the predominantly negative experience of those adults who took part. Feelings of anxiety and stress and consequences such as anger, frustration and substance misuse resulted. The adults, whilst acknowledging their place within a wider child protection system, remarked on the interaction with social workers to be cold and officious. They felt the interplay between therapy that they had received, the legal context within which they were disclosing and the ultimate child protection process of which they were now part was not fully explained or grasped by the social workers they met with. This is a systemic issue that presents itself in an inter-personal interaction; the disclosure to a social worker. It is the result of ecological influences playing out at the point of disclosure.

The efficacy of the policy in the area, the limited legislation, societal and cultural responses to abuse and victims of abuse and the power dynamics between social worker and adult stemming from professional authority on one side and personal and familial pressures on the other. One possible approach to addressing these issues would be to provide one, supportive and facilitating space that would accommodate the adult's therapeutic, legal and child protection needs while requiring just one set of information from them; one point of disclosure.

*Contribution to Knowledge: The System as A Facilitator*

One of the advantages of using a biographical narrative interviewing methodology is that the participants chose to share what they wish and how much they wish on the given topic without prompt, direction or subsequent questioning. What was observed as part of this research was not just commentary on the process of disclosing childhood abuse to social work services but also examples of the participants reflecting on the process and trying to make meaning of it. Another consequence of this was presented in the findings chapter under the sub-theme 'Hopes and Expectations', where the adults shared thoughts on what they expected would happen or what they wished they had experienced. In a field that has fallen short on the analysis of facilitating factors relating to disclosure the findings of this study in relation to the adults' hopes and expectations provide useful insight for law, policy and practice in this area. While not recording actual positive experiences, the findings do demonstrate several ways in which the system could act as a facilitator as opposed to a barrier.

## Law

The participants of the study presented an awareness of the complex legal environment surrounding their disclosures to social work services. They commented on the legal significance of the information they were providing and some went so far as to mention the possible need to safeguard against people providing false information. There was an acknowledgement that the social workers must have a level of surety about the information they are receiving due to risks of suit for defamation or malpractice. That said, the findings show that the participants felt that the social workers should have been able to exercise their duties without ‘looking over their shoulders to see who would take them to court’, as one participant put it. Another participant felt that there should be legislation backing up the social workers in their practice in this area. In these findings the adults are remarking on what appears to be one of the main stumbling blocks in relation to social work services assessing these types of disclosures; absence of legal authority.

The context chapter has outlined the legal complexity in this area. The underpinning legislation, Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991 places a duty upon social workers to ensure the welfare and protection of children in the State but does not mention a duty to adults who have experienced abuse in childhood. The 1999 Children First Guidelines do mention such an obligation and currently this is viewed as an aspect of Section 3 of the Child Care Act, with current social work practice guidance in this area being anecdotally called the ‘section 3 policy’. The context chapter has also highlighted some problematic legal issues with respect to this policy and social workers themselves have argued against using it in practice with adults or children (Shanahan, 2015).

A legal analysis of the area, which was conducted as part of the context-setting for this study (Mooney, 2017), shows the need for legislation to support social workers’ role in assessing adult disclosures of childhood abuse. The findings of the study support this, showing that the adults are not only aware of the complexity but experienced its effects and felt it is an area that should be

rectified. The analysis and findings of this research support an argument for a stand-alone legislative section or instrument which supports social workers. Such an instrument could draw upon the various legal decisions that have been laid down over the years in the higher courts of Ireland that create legal precedent for such a legal authority to receive and proactively assess disclosures of abuse, no matter how retrospective they may be. The competing constitutional and legal rights of any alleged perpetrator must always be considered but only in extenuating circumstances should act as a barrier to assess the potential risk posed to current and future children (Mooney, 2017).

A current (at time of writing) review of the Child Care Act 1991 is being undertaken by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Child protection social work in general in Ireland would benefit from a revised legislative framework which incorporates the core values of social work practice such as social justice, empowerment and advocacy. In addition, such developments should be firmly placed within a rights perspective with reference made to the Universal Declaration and European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically the latter's reference to Protection from Abuse and Neglect (Article 19). The findings from this study, while referring to adult disclosures of abuse, hold lessons for wider social work practice with service users of all ages and presenting need.

One existing template that could be used to guide such legislative development is the EU Victims Directive (2012/29/EU). The Directive was adopted by the European Parliament on 25th October 2012 with the aim of 'establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime' (2012/29/EU). Under the Directive a 'Victim' is defined as a 'natural person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss which was directly caused by a criminal offence'. The Directive reserves special protection for children and those impacted by sexual crimes. The Directive addresses much of the issues that have arisen in the findings of this research and it sets out substantive sections on the Provision of Information

and Support which includes a ‘right to understand and be understood’ (Article 3), a ‘right to receive information from the first contact with a competent authority’ (Article 4), including ‘information about your case’ (Article 6), ‘right to access victim support services’ (Article 8) and a minimum standard of such provision (Article 9). The Directive also includes rights to protection against repeat victimisation (Article 18) which will take account of the specific needs of the individual with specific regard to experiences of sexual violence (Article 22). While the Directive is framed in the context of criminal proceedings the drafting of the Directive is broad enough to encompass ancillary and related processes including child protection assessments carried out currently by Tusla (McDonald, 2018). In fact, the Directive comes in to play as soon as a complaint of an offence is made to a competent authority, whether or not a criminal investigation or process has commenced. This would therefore appear to encompass a disclosure of sexual abuse. The incorporation of such an instrument in to Irish child protection law and policy falls outside of the remit of this research, however the findings garnered from the adult participants of this study do highlight a need for such an approach.

### Policy

In addition to the need for legal authority, the findings demonstrate the need for a simplified system that considers the potential needs of adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood. Taking account of the needs of the adult is something which has been consistently referenced throughout this thesis. The literature establishes potential needs regarding mental health, substance misuse, relationship breakdown, issues regarding trust, belief and authority (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Sanderson, 2006; Beitchman et al., 1991, 1992).

Incorporating an approach such as that laid down in the EU Victims Directive is one part of the solution. However, findings from this research also show that the lack of other, more practical, elements impacted upon the adults’ experiences of disclosure. These related to issues such as the environment in

which the disclosure interview took place, the manner in which this information was received by the social workers and the lack of information afforded to the adults following this event. As noted, the EU Directive does account for these issues and, if adopted in respect of child protection practice, could place a much needed legislative and policy structure in place regarding these issues. The Barnahus or Child Advocacy Centre models however provide examples of how some of these findings could be integrated in to practice. Barnahus is a Nordic model based upon the American Child Advocacy Centre model of assessing children's allegations of abuse and neglect. 'In a Barnahus, governmental agencies related to social services, law enforcement, and health care collaborate under one roof regarding investigations of suspected crimes against children, such as physical violence and/or sexual abuse' (Johansson, 2012, p69). It has been shown that both parents and children appreciate the child-friendly and safe environment of the centres with the level of information provided by professionals found to be of critical importance (Rasmusson, 2011).

The original Child Advocacy Centre model was first announced in Huntsville, Alabama in 1984 with a primary goal of increasing prosecutions and a more humane goal of conducting child-friendly investigations with all necessary elements being 'brought to the child' (Coulborn Faller and Palusci, 2007, p1021). The United States now operates over 950 CACs nationwide (<http://www.nationalcac.org/>) with multiple other countries adopting the model. The European Union-funded Promise Project is currently examining the development of the Barnahus/CAC model within several EU countries, including Ireland. Speaking specifically about children but echoing the issues faced by the adults in this study the Promise Project highlights some of the challenges by stating that:

*Today, in Europe, children who are victims of violence often face a system that contributes to their traumatisation. They wait a long time before receiving assistance from child protection services or*

*for their case to be tried in court. They might be interviewed by several professionals and be treated in an intimidating manner.*

*(Promise 2, <http://www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/vision/>)*

Tusla is currently a lead organisation in the European-wide Promise Project ([www.childrenatrisk.eu](http://www.childrenatrisk.eu)) which seeks to examine the efficacy of Barnahus in member states. A recent meeting of the ISPCAN European Regional Conference in The Hague, Holland (October 2017) saw one of the central keynote speeches dedicated to the Barnahus and CAC models, with the City of The Hague announcing its adoption of the model from February 2018. The findings of this research make a strong argument for this being an opportune time to assess this model to complement Tusla's role in respect of adult disclosures also. Many of the adults in this study spoke about being required to re-disclose to multiple professionals over the course of their lives. They spoke about developing very detailed statements of their experiences of abuse for therapeutic or legal processes and shared their frustration and anger at these statements not being sufficient for the purposes of the social work assessment. They spoke about social workers requesting them to re-disclose and to provide further details, without which, some were told, the social workers could not proceed. This itself creating a power dynamic which served to frustrate the adults coming forward.

Similar to the child model, a 'Barnahus-type' model for use with adults would potentially incorporate legal, therapeutic, social and medical services under one roof, as it were; requiring adults to make just one disclosure to one agency who would collect sufficient information to meet multiple needs without unnecessary re-interview or engagement required by the adult. Such a model has been piloted in Norway for adult victims of domestic violence (Bredal and Stefansen, 2017, p311). The findings of this study suggest that adults tend to re-live their experiences of abuse as they prepare to meet for interview and this is in addition to the stresses of daily life such as caring for an elderly relative or

getting time off work to attend social work meetings. If policy and practice is truly to take account of the needs of adults impacted by childhood trauma then such services and policies need to meet the adult where they are at and work in collaboration to meet the child protection needs of society.

### Practice

A change in the current policy and legal framework (EU Directive) as well as the structure of assessing disclosures from both children and adults (Barnahus/CAC) would go a long way towards implementing the findings identified in this study. However, these developments would only serve to alter the existing macro, exo and meso spheres of influence albeit this being necessary to ultimately change practice on the ground. The findings of this study show that the adults' sense of frustration and re-traumatisation was often bore out of seemingly basic oversights.

Issues regarding the competency and expertise of social workers arose in the findings of this research. These factors meant different things for different participants. In some instances, they related to the professional experience of the social worker, with some adults referring to how young the social workers appeared to be; equating youth to experience. Other adults spoke about the social worker perhaps being competent in the area of child protection generally but possibly not having the skill set to deal with issues regarding sexual abuse. Similarly, others spoke about their sense that disclosures by adults were potentially not the mainstay of the social workers' role resulting in a lack of competence in the area. All the participants referred to a lack of professionalism with examples being provided regarding social workers inability coordinate two letters being sent out to two different perpetrators, and another adult having a sense of the 'captain not flying the plane' when they met with the social worker to provide their disclosure. When these data were viewed in the context of the various reports by HIQA, the State and others and in the context of previous research carried out by the author (Mooney, 2014; 2017) a consistent theme

was the lack of adequate training, policy and law in the area of adult retrospective disclosures.

What these findings also draw our attention to is a reignition of a debate surrounding the role of social work as a profession that provides child protection services. This is a role that emerged as a specific part of the social work profession in Ireland in the 1970s following the production of the Kennedy Report, as discussed in chapter two (see also Devaney and McGregor, 2016). At that time there was some resistance to social workers taking on this role and moving away from the predominant 'community worker' perspective (see also Skehill, 1999, 2000, 2008; Skehill, O'Sullivan and Buckley, 2001). We see again here that, while child protection is now a well-established role of the profession in Ireland since 1990s especially, more nuanced, legal and technical aspects of the role are being questioned and resisted, such as assessment of retrospective disclosures.

Buckley, Whelan and Carr (2011) note similar deficits in respect of Irish child protection social workers' responses to domestic violence and parental separation. They cite Friend et al (2008) and Connolly (2009) who argue that actions taken by 'highly regulated child protection services' often hinge on protective and legal action and are 'not necessarily in tune with the needs or lived experiences of service users' (2011, p128). With comparable findings to this research, their study of such lived experiences of the child protection services found that some social workers were unaware of the dynamics of domestic violence (2011, p129); some service users felt they were not taken seriously (2011, p130); and that service users experienced powerlessness in the face 'of an intimidating child protection system' (2011, p130). While the development of a new or improved system of social work falls outside the remit of this study it is noteworthy that the adoption of a Barnahus model for adults wishing to disclose would reduce the requirement for social workers to be experienced in the social, legal, therapeutic and psychological aspects of adult disclosures of abuse and their work would be supported and complimented by a

range of appropriately qualified professionals in those other fields. While supporting the need for further training in respect of sexual abuse and disclosure, the findings of this research also highlight a need for professional social work supervision to place greater emphasis on understanding disclosure and building empathy towards those seeking to come forward. The practical frustrations of delayed, recanted and withdrawn disclosure as well as denial and minimisation can feed in to interpersonal relations between social workers and adults, these must be replaced with an understanding of why such features occur and an empathy for those to whom they occur.

While issues regarding training, policy and law feed in to the issue at the heart of this research, interpersonal issues also featured within the narratives presented by the adult participants of this research. The participants mentioned issues such as experiencing the interaction as cold and officious, not receiving explanations for cancelled meetings and having their disclosure received in a casual way, such as in a hotel bar. This led to frustration and anger on the part of some of the participants and disengagement from the process on the part of others. The ethics of care lend a useful optic through which to examine these issues and explore possible solutions. As discussed in chapter four, ethics of care are a set of interwoven arguments about the nature of the good in human interactions (Meagher and Parton, 2004, p15) working from the core assumptions that humans are interdependent, all people are of equal worth and each person is unique. Parton (2003) emphasises the relational and inter-relational nature of ethics of care and it is this inter-relational aspect that assists in the analysis within this research while also complimenting and contributing to the ecological and power-relations perspective taken throughout. One of the most useful features of Parton's perspective on ethics of care is his incorporation of social constructionism which 'implies being open to the "other"' highlighting the need for communication, dialogue and interpretation (2003, p11). The 'other' is there to be understood according to Parton. It therefore emphasises Howe's ethos of 'accept me, talk to me, understand me' and leads us some way towards not only understanding the relationship between

social worker and an adult coming forward to disclose but suggests some ways in which we can remedy the deficits in such a relationship as identified in this study. An understanding of sexual abuse, the effects of such abuse, the dynamics of disclosure and how they play out over the life course and the multiple power relations within the various layers of the adult's ecological system that impact upon such a disclosure would lead to a better understanding of the individual coming forward. While social workers must be careful not to be deterministic, and the effects and consequences of childhood abuse are not generalisable, such knowledge would allow the social worker to take better cognisance of any potential needs. This is by no means a novel approach. The concept of trauma informed care has been well espoused over the last 30 years (Wilson, Pence and Conradi, 2013). Wilson et al define trauma-informed care in its simplest terms; 'if professionals were to pause and consider the role trauma and lingering traumatic stress plays in the lives of the specific client population served by an individual, professional, organization, or an entire system, how would they behave differently?' (2013, p2). They suggest that the emerging themes in trauma-informed care are the need for physical and psychological safety, collaboration with and empowerment of clients and the need to identify trauma-related needs of clients (2013). This all speaks to the needs highlighted in the findings of this study and further echoes the 'accept me, talk to me, understand me' ethos put forward by Howe (1993).

In this vein, the findings also complement existing literature regarding the issue of relationship-based practice in social work. Howe (2008) warns us about the practice of social work becoming increasingly 'procedural, legal and administrative' with an undervaluing of the relationship between worker and client which he argues is a 'major component in the success... of the service offered'. Ferguson (2017) argues similarly in terms of the 'visibility' of children within child protection practice but highlights the emotional intensity of the work as a stumbling block to relationship building. In more recent research Ferguson (2018) also highlights the issue of social workers' ability or inability to reflect in practice and highlights that one such barrier to reflection

can be the social workers' attempt to shield themselves from the emotional and sensory impact of the work (2018). This highlights issues such as vicarious trauma and emotional labour (Studsørød, 2013) in social work which has been researched in terms of student placements (Harr and Moore, 2011), medical social work (Joubert, Hocking and Hampson, 2013) and in terms of burnout and compassion fatigue (Diaconescu, 2015). Engaging with narratives of childhood abuse and trauma is work that must be supported and supervised with regard to employee health and wellbeing. Further research is required with social work practitioners to examine the impact of such work and the potential impact upon the service received by adults disclosing abuse. It is clear from this research that there is no singular issue at the heart of adults' negative experiences and that social workers need to be aware of multiple barriers to accepting, understanding and talking to service-users (See also Ruch, Turney and Ward, 2018; Trevithick, 2003).

How does a social work practitioner take all this on board and implement it in their practice with adults coming forward to disclose and other client populations? One of the key contributions of this thesis is the development of a theoretical framework of disclosure. As mentioned the framework was initially developed as a tool upon which to hang the various theories that were adopted within this research, to examine how they interact and complement one another and to ultimately make sense out of the field. As the research progressed and the data were collected and analysed, it became clear that the framework could also be used to examine and understand the process of adults' disclosures to social work services. The model incorporates the person-in-environment perspective which is central to both ecological systems theory, ethics of care and trauma-informed care. It also accounts for the inter-relationships that occur within the adult's ecological system and the power relationships that are resultant from these. The overarching social constructionist lens allows us to better understand the influence of macro elements such as policy and law within the everyday life of an adult effected by abuse and meet that adult where they are at, bringing the service to them, as promoted by the Barnahus model. Finally, the framework

incorporates a lifecourse perspective, somewhat absent in disclosure scholarship to date, and helps us to understand disclosure and abuse as co-existing, interactional trajectories playing out in a fluid nature over time and responding to an adult's ever-changing ecological system of influences and relationships. It is argued therefore that this framework is a useful tool for social work practitioners *in preparation* for meeting with an adult who has experienced abuse; *during* such work to take account of the various experiences to which the adult has been exposed and hypothesis about how they might interact; and *following* such work in a supervisory and critically reflective nature to examine the interaction and develop future practice.

## Summary

This chapter explores the research findings in the context of the literature and theories adopted as part of the research. These features were discussed in respect of the three central objectives of the study, namely, to explore facilitators and barriers to disclosure, to assess how the current system takes accounts of the potential needs of adults impacted by sexual abuse in childhood and to use the data collected to provide recommendations for practice and policy in this area. The discussion focussed on inter-personal and systemic issues and proffered possible future directions in this area. Contributions to the field are highlighted and recommendations made for future practice. Current and recent developments are flagged and incorporated to fit these findings within the contemporary social work practice and policy environment. The theoretical framework for this research is further discussed and explored with possible future uses within practice and critical reflection mooted. The following chapter will conclude with a summary, some closing comments and a note on future practice, policy and research directions.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### Introduction

The most recent study of prevalence of sexual abuse in Ireland, now sixteen years old, found that one in five women and one in six men experienced sexual abuse in their childhoods (McGee et al, 2002). Existing research literature highlights problematic issues with prevalence statistics which ultimately rely on disclosure. Disclosure of sexual abuse at any age is critical for individual recovery, apprehension of perpetrators and avoidance of further abuse of children within our families and societies. However, disclosure is complex. When it occurs, it does so through a gauntlet of physical, psychological and socio-cultural barriers (Alaggia, 2005, 2010; Azzopardi et al, 2017). The tendency is towards delayed disclosure (McElvaney, 2015), which increases in likelihood as the child ages (Finkelhor et al, 2014) towards adulthood. As the population ages and awareness of childhood sexual abuse becomes more accepted and mainstream, disclosures by adults may increase (Alaggia et al, 2017). Disclosure therefore is a lifelong, fluid and inter-relational experience beginning at the moment of abuse (Alaggia et al, 2017; Reitsema and Grietens, 2016). When it does occur, the response to disclosure is critical (Easton, 2013; Reitsema and Grietens, 2016; Browne and Finkelhor, 1986) with positive and supportive responses to disclosures made closer to the time of abuse potentially serving to alleviate or reduce the harmful effects (O’Leary et al, 2010; Alaggia et al, 2017). However due to the tendency toward delay and evidenced sleeper effects (Beitchman et al, 1992) many individuals affected by childhood abuse are not so fortunate. What the literature suggests therefore is that disclosure in adulthood should be expected, facilitated and supported by appropriate services, knowledge and awareness. In Ireland the designated service providers are social workers within the State child protection and welfare services, Tusla.

This biographical narrative research was conducted with five adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and who have engaged with social work services to disclose their experiences. The findings of the research show predominantly negative experiences with many of the adults regretting their decisions to engage and some being significantly negatively impacted by the responses they received. The findings also reveal wider structural issues within the system itself with deficits in law, policy and practice all impacting upon the adult coming forward.

## Background and Rationale

Retrospective disclosures were defined in Irish child protection policy in 1999 as ‘disclosures by adults of abuse which took place during their childhood’ (Department of Health and Children, 1999, p39). Under these and subsequent guidelines in 2011 and 2017, the child protection social work services in Ireland have been tasked with receiving, assessing and responding to such disclosures by adults. Multiple reports and investigations published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), Office of the Ombudsman for Children and The Office of the Ombudsman have shown a common theme of delay, poor communication, lack of clarity and variable and inconsistent practice in respect of how social work services manage such disclosures and respond to the adults who come forward to make them. In research published in 2014, which interviewed frontline social workers, therapy and advocacy workers and the then Assistant National Director of Child and Family Services in the State, the author found that such variability and inconsistency applied in respect of retrospective disclosures (Mooney 2014). Amongst the limitations of that study it was noted that it was necessary for future research to gather the experiences of adults who engage with social work services to gain an insight in to how such variability or inconsistency may impact upon them (Mooney, 2013).

This research sought to explore the experiences of adults disclosing childhood sexual abuse to social work services in Ireland. The objectives of the study were to chart the facilitators and barriers to such engagement, to examine if the process took account of the specific potential needs of adults affected by childhood trauma and to what extent, and to pose recommendations for social work policy, practice and law on foot of the findings.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Disclosure of abuse is a fluid, inter-relational and life-long process. It must be understood from the person-in-context perspective and take account of the various socially constructed layers of influence that interact around such an experience. Disclosure is a deeply personal experience, imbued with dynamics of trust, belief, power, fear and hope. This research adopted the stance that an individual's experience of disclosure cannot be generalised but that the lived-experiences of those effected by abuse hold key learnings for the development of this area.

The research sits within a framework of theories which the author adopted to explore and explain the phenomenon under study. The person-in-context component was examined using Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework theory and this has been used previously to study the process and experience of disclosure (Alaggia, 2005; Collin-Vézina, 2015). This study examined the ecological system as it relates to one point, the process of disclosure to social work, and all the various influences that are at play during this process. The inter-relational aspect of disclosure was examined through theories of power with specific regard to Michel Foucault. Power is resultant from relationships and, given the dynamics of abuse, power is an overarching feature within this study. Theories of power were also used to explore how the various ecological layers influence the adult coming forward to disclose, whether they be personal, familial, service or system based or law; taking cognisance of the socially

constructed nature of our knowledge, awareness and responses to abuse personally, societally and culturally.

The research was therefore qualitative in nature and utilised a specific narrative methodology, known as Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology. This sought to hold individual voice and experience as paramount. Five participants were posed a Single Question Used to Induce Narrative (SQUIN) and were not prompted, interrupted or questioned until they were satisfied that they had shared as much as they wished.

The analysis of the data took two forms; the BNIM panel analysis technique and a broader thematic analysis. BNIM promotes a panel analysis process which uses a panel of individuals to bring differing viewpoints and perspectives in respect of the data collected. In this research a panel of professionals in the field of child sexual abuse therapy, treatment, policy and practice were gathered together to analyse one entire BNIM transcript. The results of this process produced indicative themes which were used in the secondary thematic coding of data from the complete sample. One of the limitations of this study relates to the financial and time resources required to complete BNIM panel analysis on an entire sample of transcripts. The methodology does however allow for data collection using BNIM and data analysis using other approaches. This study combined approaches and used the substantive BNIM panel process to inform the latter thematic analysis. The thematic analysis produced 61 open codes from 5 transcripts. Following this open coding stage, the results of the BNIM panel analysis were used to influence the production of the axial coding and six substantive themes were identified within the data. The themes identified were The Adult, Disclosure, Interaction, Information, Social Work and Reflection.

In addition to the time and resources required to conduct the BNIM analysis there are other specific limitations in respect of the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter the sample were selected using a stringent selection of inclusion and exclusion criteria and selected via a gatekeeping organisation. While the author had no control over the final selection of participants it is

possible that the final participants were individuals who could specifically speak to the negative nature of their interactions with social work services, thereby potentially skewing the data with a negative overtone or over emphasising barriers as opposed to facilitators. This being said the international research demonstrates predominantly negative experiences of disclosure in multiple settings and environments. The gatekeeping organisation being a provider of therapeutic and advocacy services also meant that the sample were a population that may have had specific skills and experience in talking about their abuse, reflecting on the systems they have come in to contact with and generally making sense of their experiences to date. A sample from the general population may have yielded different perspectives. That said the ethical considerations in such a study are significant and to fully support those taking part it was necessary to source the sample via an organisation that could offer follow up supports. Furthermore, while not seeking to generalise from the findings of this research there are limitations in respect of the small sample size.

The sample ultimately produced a rich, insightful and significant set of narratives that have contributed to the field in this area both nationally and internationally.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The previous chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the findings of the research in the context of the literature and theories used in the research. It was possible to identify three main findings of the study and how these contributed to knowledge in the field. What follows is a brief synopsis of the main findings and the associated recommendations.

### *1. The System as a Barrier*

One of the three main objectives of this study was to explore the facilitators and barriers for adults disclosing childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services. An analysis of the overall themes and subthemes highlighted that, for the participants of this study, the overarching system surrounding adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse acted as a barrier to disclosure. Many of the barriers established in the literature were identified and echoed in this sample such as issues relating to trust, belief, fear and stigma. Structural barriers identified in the literature were also evident in the findings of this research, such as barriers in relation to the self, barriers in relation to others and barriers in relation to the social world (Collin-Vézina et al, 2015). The analysis of these data was conducted within an ecological perspective as influenced by Alaggia (2010) and Collin-Vézina et al (2015). When this perspective was applied it was clear from the data that the system itself acted as a barrier to disclosure. This included structural features such as the wider macro-level policy and legal environment, inter-relational barriers on the exo and meso levels relating to interaction with services, family dynamics and the stresses of daily life, and finally micro level factors relating to the deeply personal effects of abuse and the relationship with disclosure that plays out across the life course and how the system can replicate such dynamics. The effects and impacts of abuse being multiple and individual and linked to disclosure (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Spaccarelli, 1994). The legal scholarship involved in this research showed that the assessment of adult disclosures by child protection social workers is a somewhat unique feature of Irish child protection policy. The role is not clearly defined in law and the current situation is that policy and guidance is lacking and social workers are finding it difficult to practice in this area (Mooney, 2017; Mooney, 2014; Office of the Ombudsman, 2017). It is argued in this thesis, with the support of the literature,

that socio-cultural attitudes and historical responses to abuse and neglect within Irish society and macro-political features such as adversarial court systems, negative attitudes to compensation for victims of sexual abuse, reduced funding to therapeutic and advocacy services and a 16-year delay in running a prevalence study all create cultural and societal barriers to disclosing. Despite multiple reports and commissions of inquiry in Ireland the low public understanding and appreciation of child sexual abuse and its prevalence adds to this cultural and societal barrier. This manifests in a societal lack of awareness and inability to talk about child sexual abuse which is rooted in the socially constructed nature of our knowledge regarding this issue. The consequence is an inadequate policy, legal and practice environment that channels adults through a child protection system, already under-resourced and under pressure.

### ***Recommendation***

The findings of this study evidence a lack of competency and training in the areas of child sexual abuse and working with adults affected by childhood trauma. As noted in the discussion chapter, social workers skilled in work with children perhaps face difficulties in terms of training and skillset when dealing with life-long effects of childhood trauma. The first step towards addressing these issues is the provision of comprehensive training to child protection social workers in the area of sexual abuse and violence and disclosure. Based upon the findings of this research it is suggested that this training should also include greater awareness building regarding sexual abuse, an understanding of power dynamics synonymous with sexual abuse, fostering empathy towards those impacted by abuse and self-care techniques and ways of managing and recognising vicarious trauma. The UK based National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) provides a good template for training in this regard and further research with practitioners will be key to developing this area.

Social workers in Ireland, working in specialised Child Sexual Assault Treatments Units, specialise in the area of sexual abuse and receive training in responding to abuse and neglect, receiving disclosure, and managing sexualised behaviours. However, adults are not treated within these services and due to the passage of time since their experience of abuse, commonly do not require such specialised medical input. It should also be noted that since this study commenced, Tusla has begun to develop specialised teams to receive adult disclosures of abuse. Specialised training has been provided to such teams, a welcome move, however, they are not operational nation-wide and the first point of contact for adults coming forward to disclose remains the frontline social work office. It is the social workers at this point that require specialised training so that they can best assist the adults coming forward and provide a secure, encouraging and empathetic response to their disclosure.

As noted, wider service development may also assist in creating an environment that encourages and supports disclosure by adults. Barnahus and Child Advocacy Centre models provide a template that could also be adopted to address the issue of the system as a barrier. Such models, albeit currently designed for children, provide one point of disclosure for those affected by abuse and neglect. This reduces the trauma of re-disclosing to multiple professionals. Such services also provide a multi-disciplinary and interagency support network for the children who provide legal, therapeutic, medical and social inputs in a ‘one-stop-shop’ environment which is child centred. The model has been piloted for adults in Norway in respect of adult victims of domestic violence (Bredal and Stefansen, 2017). The Norwegian study is at a preliminary stage examining model-fit for a ‘one door’ service to adults but could hold considerable learning for Ireland in terms of how we develop our approach to assessing disclosures by adults of childhood trauma. One approach could be to incorporate the above-mentioned specialist CFA teams into a more holistic, inter-disciplinary Barnahus model.

## 2. *Power*

The next objective of the research was to examine the extent to which the needs of adults effected by childhood sexual abuse were taken in to account. While the impacts of abuse and subsequent needs are as individual as the adults themselves, the literature has established some common consequences of abuse in childhood. These effects are multiple and are detailed in a comprehensive section of the literature review (Chapter 3). Many of the established effects were identified in the narratives provided by the participants of this study and it was possible to chart these using the ecological perspective. Throughout the various ecological layers power relations were identified. The second main finding from this research is that power plays a significant role at all levels of the interaction between the adult and social worker when a disclosure is being made. In this sense, the research provides learning for social work practice, policy and law.

On a practice level social work services need to be aware that there is an automatic power disparity created due to reporting policy and law in Ireland which obliges a therapeutic organisation working with an adult to refer their disclosures of abuse to child protection services. Thereby obliging the adult to engage with the child protection service. The disparity is further compounded by the fact that the child protection services are also a statutory authority and thereby the social workers who represent this service hold a position of power over the service users, whether intentionally exercised or not. Such power must be interrogated (Smith, 2013) to allow a move from ‘power over’ to a more collaborative exercise of ‘power to’ or ‘power with’ as discussed in previous chapter four (Allen, 1998; Smith, 2013; Haugaard and Clegg, 2013). In compliment to the theoretical model developed as part of this research, this thesis also argues for a critical interrogation of power. The thesis supports Haugaard and Clegg’s approach of viewing the various theories of power as one would different members of the one family. The usefulness of examining

social work interactions in terms of *power over*, *power to* and *power with* is also emphasised as something which could ultimately benefit social work practice and supervision in a general sense.

Power is a recognised dynamic in respect of child sexual abuse (e.g. Finkelhor 1986; Death, 2013; Bell, 2011; Hagan and Smail, 1997). The adults who participated in this study have experienced various forms of power, ranging from the abusive experience(s) itself right through the life course to the point at which they disclose to social work services. This research shows that power also manifests in the family dynamics surrounding the adult, whether the abuse is intra-familial or not. Power also plays a role in why the adults wanted to tell. Many of the adults who took part in this research spoke about their wish to protect current and future children from abuse. Even though many felt obliged to engage with social work services, they ultimately had a sense of wanting to stop the abuse of children and this fed in to their reason for engaging.

### *Recommendation*

Power and power relations must be interrogated and critically reflected upon for social workers to take account of them and integrate their significance in to their assessments and wider practice. Findings from this research support the need for social workers to understand their own power and authority but also develop an understanding of the various power relations and influences that may be impacting upon an adult coming forward to disclose childhood sexual abuse (see also Tew 2006). The theoretical framework, developed as part of this research, is proposed here as a potential reflective tool for social workers to analyse their own power but more specifically to develop an understanding of the various influences that may be impacting upon an adult coming forward to disclose childhood abuse. The framework encourages social workers to reflect upon the macro and socially constructed influences that may act as barriers to an adult disclosing. It also supports consideration of internal and micro/meso

factors that may be impacting upon the adult. These are well documented and discussed throughout this study and relate to issues such as family dynamics, apprehension, stigma, shame, fear and lack of trust amongst others. The findings of this research also demonstrated adults' anxiety about the environment in which an interview might take place, how many social workers would be present and what would happen with the information they share. The theoretical framework, incorporating aspects such as power relations, ecological influences, social constructed structural issues and internal and personal factors could allow the social worker to be better prepared and meet the adult 'where they are at'; promoting the 'know me' and 'understand me' aspects of Howe's triptych of person centred care. Sometimes large periods of time pass before disclosure to social work services occurs either due to fear, stigma, family dynamics or potential sleeper effects where a realisation of the abuse does not occur until much later in life or following a triggered memory. It is a recommendation, based on the findings of this research, that such a framework could be utilised in preparation for meeting with an adult, during such work to allow the social worker to further populate the framework with client specific information, and after such work as a critically reflective and supervisory tool.

### *3. The System as a Facilitator*

The third substantive objective of this research was to explore policy recommendations that can inform social work practice in this area; the sub-title of this thesis is 'messages for society and policy makers regarding disclosures of childhood sexual abuse'. The findings of the research highlight a predominantly negative experience of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to social work services. The data collected emphasise numerous areas where social work practice could improve; provision of further clarity and information to adults, clear communication, advanced warning about potential triggers such as contact being made with perpetrators or family members, provision of a safe

and supportive environment and an understanding of abuse and disclosure. Future research is also necessary to examine the extent to which professional burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma may impact upon this area. The overarching finding of this research, in respect of these areas of potential improvement, is that it is predominantly not individual social work practice that is at fault, although some significant interpersonal issues were identified in the research, but instead a wider system failure to take account of and best serve adults who have experienced childhood trauma; as discussed above – the system as a barrier.

The existing literature has highlighted such negative experiences of disclosure in multiple settings and has found that negative experiences are prominent findings of such scholarship. The literature calls for further studies to be conducted to examine facilitators to disclosure. By presenting what they experienced as the deficits of the Irish system, the participants of this study provided an insight in to what could be done differently. In combination with the above-mentioned framework, which emerged from the findings and the wider research, it is possible to present what the system might look like as a facilitator.

### *Recommendation*

The final recommendation from this research is that the wider system needs to incorporate an approach and culture that accommodates and supports adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and childhood trauma in general. Disclosures from adults can identify current or future risks to children and young people in society and they are an effective and important means of stopping the cycle of abuse within society. It is recommended that current child protection policy be updated to more fully encompass adult disclosures of abuse and that the EU Victims Directive, being trauma-informed and service user centred, serves as an appropriate template from which to develop such policy.

This Directive can also be utilised in conjunction with the established legal precedents in this area to develop legislative provision to support social workers in this area of work and provide them with statutory backing to perform assessments of adult disclosures (Mooney, 2017).

It is further recommended that such policy and legal innovations should be developed in conjunction with an environment that meets the needs of adults and children effected by abuse and neglect. It is recommended that the current Barnahus and Promise Project initiatives are persuasive models that could be adopted in this regard. Social work practice with adults needs to be trauma informed and it is argued that the adoption of these two legal and policy recommendations along with the use to the aforementioned framework would enhance practice in this regard. Adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse have been part of the child protection system since 1999 and it is imperative that they now be fully incorporated and accounted for in the legal, policy and practice contexts.

### Concluding Comment: Future Research and Directions

This research is merely a starting point, a call to action for future researchers, policy makers, practitioners and service users to further advance this area to a point where disclosure of sexual abuse is encouraged, facilitated and supported with proactive mechanisms put in place to reduce stigma, fear and anxiety. The following future research, practice and policy directions are therefore proffered:

- While not designed to be generalisable, the possibility of developing new policy from the data received from five adults is unlikely. This research therefore calls for future research in this area, including any national studies of prevalence of sexual abuse and violence to further assess the experiences of disclosure to State services and authorities.

- A renewed national prevalence and attitudes study is urgently required so that policy, practice and resources can be evidence-informed and meet current and emerging issues in the area of sexual abuse and violence.
- Research is required with frontline child protection social workers to assess the level of knowledge, awareness and competency regarding the dynamics of sexual abuse and disclosure with an emphasis on the development of a trauma-informed method of practice. Such research may also address the issues of professional burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma that may impact this area but fall outside the design and scope of this research.
- In addition to this, further training at qualifying and post-qualifying level is required in social work regarding issues of sexual abuse, disclosure, trauma-informed care and lifecourse perspectives.
- The assessment and piloting of a Barnahus-type model needs to be fully funded and progressed. Such an initiative must take cognisance of social work's role in assessing adult disclosures and the adoption of such a model for adults must be seriously considered. Existing expertise in the areas of specialised retrospective disclosure assessment teams, sexual assault treatment units and therapeutic and advocacy services could be drawn upon in this regard.
- While adopted in Irish law in the form of the Criminal Justice Act 2017, the EU Victims Directive should be considered as a template upon which to base any new policy or practice frameworks for working with adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood. This research emphasises the potential for this Directive to directly address many of the problematic issues that the participants of this study faced when interacting with social work services.
- The theoretical framework developed as part of this research needs to be further developed and piloted in practice. Its ecological and lifecourse perspective, integrating key theories of power, social constructionism

and ethics of care make it a potentially useful tool in social work practice and supervision in general.

In conjunction with the findings of this study it is argued that the above future developments would move Ireland towards creating a society and infrastructure that encourages, facilitates and supports disclosures of childhood sexual abuse by adults and pro-actively identifies and protects those children in our society who are not receiving adequate care and protection and who may be at risk of sexual abuse.

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N.L v. HSE [2014] IEHC 151

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Phelps v Hillingdon [2001] 2 AC 619

S v. Gloucestershire County Council [2001] 2 WLR 909

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Z Ors v. UK Application No. 29392/95, April 5, 2001, European Court of Human Rights.

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Child Care Act 1991

Children Act 1908

Children Act 1989

Children First Act 2015

Criminal Justice Act 2006

Criminal Law (Incest Proceedings) Act 1995

Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act, 2012

EU Victims Directive 2012/29/EU.

Health Act 1970

Poor Relief (Ireland) Act 1838

Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of Children, Act 1889

Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998

Reformatory School (Ireland) Act 1858

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



# Appendix

## Appendix 1: A Brief Synopsis of the Reports and Recommendations

### **The Ferns Report - 2005**

The Ferns Report concerned over 100 allegations of child sexual abuse made against 21 priest and clergy in the diocese of Ferns between 1962 and 2002. Six of the priests against which allegations were made were deceased at the time of the allegations, three died subsequent to the allegations being made and eight allegations were made to the Gardaí. Of all allegations, three progressed to criminal proceedings resulting in two convictions. The third set of criminal proceedings related to allegations concerning Father Sean Fortune. Father Fortune however committed suicide at his accommodation, in New Ross, County Wexford, just days before these proceedings were set to take place. 'By 1980, Bishop Herlihy recognised that there was a psychological or medical dimension to the issue of child sexual abuse' (The Ferns Report, 2005).

### **The Murphy Report - 2009**

The Murphy Report did not involve investigation and substantiation of child abuse allegations and the report notes that it was 'concerned only with the response of Church and State authorities to a representative sample of complaints and suspicions of child sexual abuse by priests' (Commission of Investigation, 2009, p2). The report dealt with allegations of child sexual abuse against 172 priests in the Dublin Arch-Diocese and covered a period from 1975 to 2004. There were a further eleven unnamed priests and the report eventually included 102 individuals within its remit and terms of reference. The report revealed that, of all allegations made, a significant number of the individuals concerned admitted the abuse with one priest admitting to the abuse of over one hundred children.

### **The Ryan Report - 2009**

The Commission to Inquire in Child Abuse was 'established on 23rd May 2000 pursuant to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act, 2000 as an independent statutory body' (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009, p1, vol. 1). The inquiry gathered evidence from 1090 participants who made claims of experiencing abuse in State and Religious schools and residential facilities between 1914 and 2000. In all, 216 school and residential facilities were included in the inquiry, many of which were the subject of repeated allegations. Sexual abuse was alleged by approximately half of the witnesses (Ibid, 2009).

### **The Cloyne Report - 2010**

The Cloyne Report is particularly significant in the context of this research because the report itself covers a period from 1996 to almost the present day. This covers a period prior to the roll-out of Children First 1999 and the entire period during which it operated. Towards the end of the investigation detailed in the Murphy Report, that Commission was asked by Government to carry out a similar investigation in the

Diocese of Cloyne. The Cloyne Report, as with the Murphy report does not seek to substantiate allegations but instead investigates how allegations were handled. Allegations were brought forward in relation to 32 named clerics and one unnamed however 19 were deemed to satisfy the remit of the inquiry. 'Of the 163 clerics listed in the Diocese of Cloyne Diocesan Directory for 1996, there have been allegations made or concerns expressed about 12 (7.6%)' (Commission of Investigation, 2010, p2). There has been one successful criminal conviction related to the Cloyne Report (Ibid, 2010).

### **Kelly: A Child is Dead - 1996**

This report published in 1996 concerned the tragic death of Kelly Fitzgerald. While no direct evidence of sexual abuse is presented the report is significant because it highlights that 'a relatively sudden recognition of the reality of sexual abuse led to an imbalance in the system and a lowering of the concern and priority accorded to cases of suspected neglect' (Joint Committee on the Family, 1996, p159). Kelly Fitzgerald died because of extreme neglect at the hands of her parents. The report provides evidence of hard labour from a young age and regular beatings as well as 'evidence that food and its deprivation represented a major element of the parents' methods of disciplining some of the children in the family' (Ibid, 1996, p191). This family was known to social services in both England and Ireland prior to Kelly's death. Both parents were sentenced to 18 months imprisonment as a result.

### **The Kilkenny Incest Investigation - 1993**

This report concerned an investigation into the repeated rape, incest and assault perpetrated by a father over a period of from 1976 to 1991. The public shock following the criminal trial, resulting in a 7-year prison sentence, led to the commission of the investigation. This family was also known to social service and the report investigates their responses to situation at the time (South Eastern Health Board, 1993).

### **The Roscommon Child Care Case - 2010**

The Roscommon Report again concerned a family that were known to social services. The report examined the management of the case by the Health Service Executive, highlighted the shortcomings and made recommendations. The report is significantly recent having been published in 2010. It deals with the systematic abuse and ill-treatment of the six children within this family and makes specific references to importance of the voice of the child. The mother in this case was convicted and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for incest and ill-treatment, while the father in the case was convicted and sentenced to 14 years for rape and sexual assault (Health Service Executive, 2010).

## Appendix 2: Recruitment Poster



# HOW ADULTS TELL:

## MESSAGES FOR SOCIETY AND POLICY MAKERS REGARDING DISCLOSURE OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

Are you a man or woman above the age of 19 who has experienced sexual abuse in your childhood?

Are you currently, or have you recently received services relating to these experiences?

Have you made a formal disclosure or referral of these experiences to Child Protection Social Work Services?

**If so, would you be interested in sharing your experiences of disclosing to social work services by taking part in a 60-90 minute interview?**

This research is kindly facilitated by:



**Aim of this research:**

This study seeks to explore adults' experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to child protection social work services.

**Why should I participate?**

By participating in this study you will add to public and professional understanding and lend a crucial voice to potential policy development in this area.

Your experiences and voice may also benefit other adults who may wish to come forward to disclose or refer in the future.

**Any Risks?**

Participating in this interview may bring up some upsetting feelings or memories. All precautions will be taken to minimise this risk.

**Your Commitment:**

Choosing to participate involves taking part in a once-off, 60-90 minute interview.

If you would like to participate, or would like more information please contact the researcher, Joseph Mooney, at the contact details below.

—THANK YOU—

**Contact Details:**

Joseph Mooney (Researcher)  
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
National University of Ireland, Galway  
Tel: 083 - 4554382 (Voicemail - calls returned within 24 hours)  
Email: [j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie](mailto:j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie)

## Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet



### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
**(Voicemail)**  
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,  
within 24 hours  
North Campus,  
**j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie**  
National University of Ireland,  
Galway

Tel: **(083) 4554382**

-calls returned

email:

#### **Research Project**

#### ***How Adults Tell: Messages for Society and Policy Makers Regarding Disclosure of childhood Sexual Abuse***

**Primary Researcher:** Joseph Mooney LLB, MA

**Supervisor:** Professor Caroline McGregor

**Funding Sponsor:** National University of Ireland, Galway Doctoral Research Scholarship

**Invitation to Participate:** You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This Participant Information Sheet will tell you about this research. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a **Consent Form**. If there is anything that you are not clear about, I will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read this information sheet. You should only consent to participate when you feel that you understand what is being asked of you, and when you have had enough time to think about your decision.

**Purpose of the study:** I am doing this study because I want adults to feel confident, safe and have clarity about the process when disclosing their experiences of childhood sexual abuse to social work services. This study will examine what aspects of this process make it easier or more difficult for adults to disclose. You have been invited to participate because you have been through

this process and your experiences are valuable to this study. Participants are being sought through the Rape Crisis Network Ireland and One in Four.

**Study Procedures:** This study will use a research method known as Biographical Narrative Interviewing. The interview will last between 60-90 minutes and will take place at the centre where you usually receive therapy or advice. You will be asked an initial open question about your referral to social work services after which you can choose to tell me as much or as little as you like. I will not interrupt at any point and will take a few notes while you are speaking. Following this I will ask a few questions based on what you have told me and then you will have a chance to ask or add anything you wish. After about 10 days I will make a short follow up phone call to make sure you have no further questions and to remind you of the supports available to you. This interview will be the only requirement on your time.

**Potential benefits and risks:** The entire study will conclude in 2017 at which time you will be provided with results and information as to how your contribution has helped. You will also be provided with initial findings a few months after all interviews have been conducted (including information about the range of experiences gathered, positive and negative elements of disclosure etc.). Your participation can help researchers, policy makers, other adult survivors and society to better understand the process of disclosing to social work services. This information could change practice and policy in this area. My intention is that there will be minimal risk to you. However, some questions may raise uncomfortable feelings or emotions related to past experiences. While I will not be asking any direct questions about experiences of abuse you are free to speak about these experiences if you wish. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose to refuse to answer any questions or to stop participating at any point. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way.

**Confidentiality:** At all times the information you provide will be strictly confidential and your identity will never be published or linked with what you chose to say in the interview. All information you provide will be securely held and after the interviews are completed, only I will have access to your contact information. The only information I will collect will be your name, how best to contact you and whatever you decide to share during the interview. Your name and other personal identifying information will never be used in any reports, presentations or publications. **Please note, however, that there are limits to my ability to keep all matters confidential. If it emerges that you pose a risk to yourself, then I will discuss this with the therapy or advocacy organisation that referred you to the study. If I believe that there is a clear and serious risk to others, then I may be required to report this to the relevant authorities (e.g. Health services and/or the Garda).**

**Audiotape Recordings:** In order to conduct this research, I will ask your permission to digitally record what is said during the interview for data analysis purposes only. All digital recordings will be destroyed following the conclusion

of the research and only I will have access to these recordings throughout the research.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and should you decide to participate your experiences will provide an invaluable contribution to this research.**

If anything causes you concern, or if you have questions, you may contact me, the primary researcher of the study, Joseph Mooney at [j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie](mailto:j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie) or at **(083) 4554382 (Voicemail – calls returned within 24 hours)**.

This research was approved by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this study, please contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, [ethics@nuigalway.ie](mailto:ethics@nuigalway.ie).

***--THANK YOU--***

## Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form



### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre  
(Voicemail)  
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,  
within 24 hours  
North Campus,  
**j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie**  
National University of Ireland,  
Galway

Tel: **(083) 4554382**

-calls returned

email:

#### **Research Project**

#### ***How Adults Tell: Messages for Society and Policy Makers Regarding Disclosure of Childhood Sexual Abuse***

**Primary Researcher:** Joseph Mooney LLB, MA

**Supervisor:** Professor Caroline McGregor

**Funding Sponsor:** National University of Ireland, Galway Doctoral Research Scholarship

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study explore adult survivor's experiences of disclosing or referring childhood sexual abuse to child protection social workers.

**Study Procedures:** The study will involve a 60-90 minute interview about you experiences of disclosing childhood sexual abuse to social work services. The interview will take place in the centre where you usually receive advice, therapy or counselling. A short follow-up call approximately 10 days after the interview will be made to you to ensure that you are safe and that you know who to contact if in need of support.

**Potential benefits and risks:** Your participation can help researchers, policy makers, other adult survivors and society to better understand the process of disclosing to social work services. This information could change practice and

policy in this area. My intention is that there will be minimal risk to you. However, some questions may raise uncomfortable feelings or emotions related to past experiences. While I will not be asking any direct questions about experiences of abuse you are free to speak about these experiences if you wish.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the research study is entirely voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to take part will not affect you in any way. At any point, you may refuse to answer any question or stop participating altogether. You may freely ask questions about this agreement now or at any time.

**Confidentiality:** All information you share with me will be securely held and kept strictly confidential. Your name and other personal identifying information will never be used in any reports, presentations or publications. **Please note, however, that there are limits to my ability to keep all matters confidential. If it emerges that you pose a risk to yourself, then I will discuss this with the therapy or advocacy organisation that referred you to the study. If I believe that there is a clear and serious risk to others, then I may be required to report this to the relevant authorities (e.g. Health services and/or the Garda).**

**Audiotape Recordings:** In order to conduct this research, I am asking your permission to digitally record what is said during the interview for data analysis purposes only. All digital recordings will be destroyed following the conclusion of the research and only I, the primary researcher, will have access to these recordings throughout the research.

If anything causes you concern, or if you have questions, you may contact me, Joseph Mooney, at [j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie](mailto:j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie) or at (083) 4554382 (Voicemail – calls returned within 24 hours).

This research was approved by the National University of Ireland, Galway Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this study, please contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, [ethics@nuigalway.ie](mailto:ethics@nuigalway.ie).

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated..... (version.....) for the above study

and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

**Name of Participant**

**Date**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Person taking consent**

**Date**

**Signature**

(if different from researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher**

**Date**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**--THANK YOU--**

Appendix 5: Demographic Information Request Form



UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
(Voicemail)  
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,  
within 24 hours  
North Campus,  
**j.mooney4@nuigalway.ie**  
National University of Ireland,  
Galway

Tel: **(083) 4554382**

-calls returned

email:

**Research Project**

***How Adults Tell: Messages for Society and Policy Makers Regarding  
Disclosure of childhood Sexual Abuse***

**--DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION--**

**1. What is your gender?**

- a. Male
- b. Female

**2. What is your Age?**

- a. 19-29 years old
- b. 30-39 years old
- c. 40-49 years old
- d. 50 years and over

Thank you for your time

## Appendix 6: On Whom did Primary Social Work Research Focus?

From Shaw, Ramatowski and Ruckdeschel, 2013, p737)

		N	Grouped categories				
			N	%			
Actual or potential service user or carer groupings	1. Children, families, parents, foster carers.	29	93	38.4			
	2. Young people (not offenders).	19					
	3. Young offenders/victims.	3					
	4. Adult offenders/victims.	3					
	5. Adults with housing, homelessness, education or employment difficulties.	5					
	6. People with mental health problems.	18					
	7. Older people.	6					
	8. Adults/children with health/disability difficulties (including learning disabilities).	7					
	9. Adults/children who are drug/substance users.	1					
	10. Equal focus on two or more different user and/or carer groups.	2					
Citizen, user and community populations	11. People as members of communities.	11	36	14.9			
	12. Service user, citizen or carer populations.	4					
	13. Women/men.	21					
Professional and policy communities	14. Social work practitioners/managers.	30	64	26.4			
	15. Social work students/practice teachers/university social work staff.	14					
	16. Social work and/or other researchers.	13					
	17. Policy, regulatory or inspection community.	2					
	18. Members or students of other occupations.	1					
	19. Jointly social work and other professional communities/agencies.	4					
	Not applicable	20. For example, theorizing that crosses categories; methodology.			49	49	20.2
	Total	242					

## Appendix 7: Primary Issues of Problems Researched in Social Work Research.

From Shaw, Ramatowski and Ruckdeschel, 2013, p738)

What is the primary issue or problem focus of the research?	Total	%
1. Understand/explain issues related to risk, vulnerability, abuse, identity, coping, challenging behaviour, separation, attachment, loss, disability or trauma.	32	13.3
2. Understand/explain issues related to equality, oppression, diversity, poverty, employment, housing, education and social exclusion.	13	5.4
3. Understand/assess/strengthen user/carer/citizen/community involvement in social work; community organization, partnership; empowerment.	5	2.1
4. Understand/promote the nature and quality of informal care, carer activity, volunteering, and their relationship to formal care.	6	2.5
5. Describe, understand, explain, or develop good practice in relation to social work beliefs, values, cultural heritage, political positions, faith, spirituality or ethics.	6	2.5
6. Understand/develop/assess/evaluate social work practices, methods, or interventions, including their recording/documentation.	23	9.6
7. Understand/evaluate/strengthen social work/social care services, including voluntary/independent sector.	12	5.0
8. Understand/explain practice or promote good practice in social work/social care organizations, programmes and/or management.	13	5.4
9. Understand/respond to issues of nationhood, race, ethnicity, racism.	3	1.3
10. Understand/respond to issues of gender, sexism, the role of women, the role of men.	10	4.2
11. Understand/respond to issues about the form and significance of the family.	1	0.4
12. Demonstrate/assess the value of inter-disciplinary or inter-professional approaches to social work services.	4	1.7
13. Demonstrate/assess the value of comparative, cross-national, cross-cultural research; and of cultural distinctiveness/awareness.	9	33.8
14. Develop theorizing.	16	6.7
15. Understand/appraise/develop the practice and quality of social work research (including user/carer involvement in research; uses of research, practitioner research, scientific practice, feminist research; anti-racist research methods).	77	32.1
16. Understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career.	10	4.2
	240	