

Truth Project Thematic Report

Child sexual abuse in sports

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project

 INDEPENDENT INQUIRY
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Disclaimer

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Truth Project is a core part of the Inquiry alongside public hearings and research. It was set up to hear and learn from the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales. It offers victims and survivors an opportunity to share experiences of child sexual abuse. By doing so, Truth Project participants make an important contribution to the work of the Inquiry. With the consent of participants, the Inquiry uses Truth Project information in a variety of ways, including for ongoing research and data analysis carried out by the Inquiry's Research Team.

This is the fourth research publication in a series of thematic reports examining the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse shared with the Truth Project. We have previously published research reports on child sexual abuse in religious institutions, children's homes and residential care, and custodial institutions. This report details the research findings in relation to experiences of abuse in sports contexts. This study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge relating to child sexual abuse in sports, in particular by sharing the experiences of victims and survivors of abuse in sport across a broad time period and in relation to recreational sporting activities.

We have used the term 'sports contexts' in this report to describe environments and situations where children and young people take part in organised sports activities (including alongside adult participants), for example in sports clubs, sports institutions or sports associations or where they participate in sporting activity in a sporting or leisure location (for example, a public swimming pool) and the perpetrator works or volunteers there (for example, a leisure centre worker or swimming pool lifeguard).

This report presents the Inquiry's research findings about experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in sports and the response of institutions to such abuse. It describes the experiences of Truth Project participants sexually abused in sports contexts between the 1950s and 2010s, with the most recent cases in our sample beginning in the early 2010s. The research findings included in this report do not reflect all experiences of sexual abuse in sports contexts and are only indicative of the specific experiences of those who chose to share their experiences with the Truth Project.

Sample and methods

Of the 3,939 people who shared an experience between June 2016 and March 2020, 64 (2 percent) described child sexual abuse that took place in a sports context. Fifty-eight (91 percent) of these 64 participants reported being sexually abused by a sporting coach or volunteer in a sports organisation. All perpetrators spoken about by this group were adult males. Sports clubs were most frequently reported as the location of the abuse (39 out of 64; 61 percent).

The report details findings in relation to child sexual abuse which occurred in a wide variety of different sports including team sports, individual competitive sports, contact and non-contact sports and those ranging from formally organised clubs to private coaching arrangements, as well as abuse which occurred within public sports and leisure facilities.

Given the small number of people sexually abused in sports who have so far participated in the Truth Project, we have adopted a qualitative approach in the analysis undertaken for this report. We have analysed 9 of the 64 Truth Project accounts relating to child sexual abuse in sports contexts in detail. The accounts selected include a range of characteristics and circumstances, such as the time period in which the abuse occurred, victim age and victim sex.¹ The wider analysis of Truth Project accounts is ongoing and we will publish a full report with a bigger sample size covering all contexts of abuse at the end of the Inquiry.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee prior to the collection and analysis of the data and information is only included where Truth Project participants have agreed to their accounts being used for research purposes.

Key findings from the research

The research findings from this study are drawn from the nine participant accounts selected for the qualitative analysis.² Although Truth Project analysis is still underway, ongoing analysis and review of wider Truth Project sessions' data indicates that child sexual abuse in sports is generally very similar to abuse carried out in other institutional contexts. However, the research findings also indicate there are some particular characteristics of sexual abuse in sports contexts.

In contrast to the cases of child sexual abuse in sport involving high-performing or elite athletes that have garnered media attention in recent years, the experiences shared with the Inquiry by participants through the Truth Project reflect more diversity and more 'grassroots' contexts. Although there was clear exploitation and manipulation of victims and survivors by coaches and others involved in sports activities with children in the cases examined in this research, there was little evidence in the nine participants' accounts of perpetrators specifically exploiting the victims and survivors' future career prospects or sporting success as a method of grooming or coercion.

¹ A detailed explanation of the process used for carrying out analysis of Truth Project information can be found in the separate report, *Truth Project Research: Methods* (King and Brähler, 2019).

² Please note that these research findings are not necessarily representative of the wider population.

- The enabling factors for abuse to take place in sport were similar to those found in our other thematic reports into abuse in other contexts, and included: perpetrators actively approaching parents outside of the sports context to look after or take children out unsupervised; perpetrators arranging overnight stays with children; and a lack of supervision or oversight of adults working in sports, particularly those operating as leaders or as private coaches or instructors.

“ My older brother [name] and I had [sport] lessons at [sports venue] and we were part of the [sports club]. [Perpetrator] gave my brother [sport] lessons and he came to the family home to ask permission to take both of us on a trip to [city]. My abuse started on the trip to [city], but my brother was already being molested.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

- Physical contact was a more specific enabling factor found in participants' accounts related to sexual abuse in sports as it is more common in sporting activities and was sometimes used as a pretext by perpetrators to sexually abuse children, for example while swimming or in the foam pit in gymnastics.
- For most participants, taking part in sport was not a defining or central factor of their lives as children or the lives of their families, but rather it was part of wider activities and hobbies they enjoyed. However, the links between the families of perpetrators and victims and survivors fostered through sporting activities meant it was particularly difficult for some participants to disclose what was happening to them and some perpetrators were more easily able to abuse siblings as well.
- Sexual abuse by those involved in sports contexts was often perpetrated during overnight stays, trips away and visiting the perpetrator's home, sometimes, but not always, associated with the activities of the sports club or association. Perpetrators also sometimes used sports-related rewards, such as allowing the child to play in a more senior team, as a method of grooming or coercion.
- Although some participants experienced psychological and emotional abuse linked to grooming and manipulation alongside the sexual abuse, none of them described experiencing physical violence or other forms of abuse by perpetrators in sports contexts.
- Most participants did not actively or formally disclose their sexual abuse in sports as a child. A key theme discussed by participants was how much they wanted, or tried, to tell someone about what was happening to them but how difficult this was. Adults failed to respond appropriately to behavioural changes or other indicators of concern in children, even when these were very apparent. Participants who did manage to disclose as children were often dismissed or ignored and subject to victim-blaming responses by adults in a range of institutions.

“ No, this isn't over. This is never going to be over. This is never going to be clear and cut and dried just because he got convicted or went to prison. People are going to have – and it's not just in here – people are going to have those opinions, people are going to say, “Prove it”. People are going to say, “Why didn't you do x?”, or, “Wasn't your skirt too short?”, or like that.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

- The impacts of experiencing child sexual abuse in sports described by participants are extensive and diverse, with some participants describing the far-reaching impact of their experiences:

“ So, that first time was – I remember thinking to myself, “Please don’t, please don’t do this because you’re going to – you know, it’s going to ruin the rest of my life, you know.” And it’s that – you can’t describe it – the amount of pain you have from that first instant ... You’re never going to feel pain like that again.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Despite their experiences of abuse in sporting contexts, participants did not report subsequently desisting from sport and exercising, as a child or later in their lives.

This report reflects victims and survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse in sports, presented in the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 provides background information about the Inquiry, the Truth Project and the research aims.
- Chapter 2 provides information on the Truth Project dataset, some key characteristics of participants who have shared an experience with the Truth Project about sexual abuse in sports and the sampling framework used for this report.
- Chapter 3 sets out some key background information relating to child sexual abuse and safeguarding in sport to help situate our research findings.
- Chapter 4 provides socio-demographic information about victims and survivors who shared their experiences of sexual abuse in sports contexts with the Truth Project. It also provides a description of the family and early life backgrounds of the participants.
- Chapter 5 details the context and nature of the sexual abuse experienced by those who participated in sports as children.
- Chapter 6 describes the characteristics and features of the sports contexts and how these facilitated the perpetration of child sexual abuse. It considers what participants shared about what knowledge institutions and the individuals within them had about abuse that was occurring at the time.
- Chapter 7 presents information about participants’ experiences of disclosing the sexual abuse, both as children and as adults and the impact of the responses upon them. The barriers to disclosure shared by participants are also reported. It also describes participants’ experiences of the police and criminal justice system after disclosing or reporting the abuse.
- Chapter 8 describes the range of impacts of the sexual abuse shared by participants and what has helped or hindered their recovery.
- Chapter 9 relays ways participants have found of coping with their experiences of sexual abuse as children. It also describes their experiences of formal and informal support in helping them deal with the consequences and impacts of child sexual abuse in sports.

- Chapter 10 concludes the report by providing a summary of the key research findings and themes identified in the report. The chapter concludes by detailing the changes participants think are necessary to prevent child sexual abuse in sports in future and to improve responses to, and support for, victims and survivors.

Note on language

Please see Appendix A for a glossary which contains definitions of various terms used throughout this report.

Where the term 'abuse' is used throughout the report we are generally referring to sexual abuse unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter provides background information about the Inquiry, the Truth Project and the aims of this research.

1.1 Background to the Inquiry

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('the Inquiry') was set up as a statutory inquiry in March 2015. The Inquiry aims to consider the extent to which state and non-state institutions in England and Wales have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and to make meaningful recommendations for change. Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in sexual activities. It includes contact and non-contact sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and grooming a child in preparation for sexual abuse. The Inquiry has 15 investigations into child sexual abuse, focusing on a range of different institutions. These investigations consider the nature and scale of, and institutional responses to, child sexual abuse in institutions. These investigations provide the Inquiry with a sound basis from which to consider contemporary, national issues concerning the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Further information about how the Inquiry works and its Terms of Reference can be found on the [Inquiry website](#).

Where appropriate we have considered our research findings alongside those of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia (which concluded in 2017), as it is the most recent comparable national inquiry addressing similar issues.

1.2 Background to the Truth Project

The Truth Project is a core part of the Inquiry alongside public hearings and research. It was set up to hear and learn from the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales. It offers victims and survivors an opportunity to share experiences of child sexual abuse. People can participate in the Truth Project through a private session – either in person or over the telephone – or by submitting a written account of their experience. By doing so, Truth Project participants make an important contribution to the work of the Inquiry. The Truth Project was piloted in November 2015 with the offer of private sessions commencing in June 2016. Up to the end of May 2020 over 4,800 people have come forward to share an experience. So far, most people have attended a private session in person.³ These experiences will influence the Inquiry's findings and help inform its recommendations for improving child protection in institutions across England and Wales and ensuring they are focused on the best interests of children. Further information about the Truth Project can be found on the [Truth Project website](#).

³ It should be noted that the option of private sessions via telephone was only fully introduced in October 2018, and it is anticipated that the number of victims and survivors sharing experiences in this way will grow over time.

1.3 Using Truth Project data for research

Information gathered through the Truth Project provides the Inquiry with rich insights into child sexual abuse. With the consent of participants, the Inquiry uses this information in a variety of ways including for ongoing research and data analysis carried out by the Inquiry's Research Team.⁴ Using this information for research allows us to build the evidence base around child sexual abuse and institutional failures to protect children from it. It is an important building block in helping the Inquiry develop recommendations to prevent child sexual abuse happening in the future and improve institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Further details about how and why Truth Project information is used for research can be found in the separate *Truth Project Research: Methods* report (King and Brähler, 2019).

1.3.1 Research questions

The Truth Project analysis explores two overarching research questions:

- What have victims and survivors shared about their experiences of child sexual abuse and the institutional contexts in which it occurred and was responded to?
- What similarities and differences are there in victims and survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse across time periods, groups and institutions?

This report seeks to explore the first research question and its themes and research sub-questions as set out in Table 1.1, specifically in relation to child sexual abuse experienced in sports contexts. With regard to the second research question, in this report we explore the similarities and differences in experiences of child sexual abuse between participants abused in sports contexts.⁵

This report is the fourth Truth Project thematic report to be published and details Truth Project participants' experiences of sexual abuse in a range of sports contexts. Our first thematic report focused on child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions (Hurcombe et al., 2019), the second on child sexual abuse in the context of children's homes and residential care (Soares et al., 2019) and the third on child sexual abuse in custodial institutions (Darling et al., 2020). We will be conducting further analysis in future thematic reports and for the final report at the end of the Inquiry.

⁴ It is important to note that the main purpose of the Truth Project is to hear and learn from victims and survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse in the way they chose to share them. The Truth Project has not been designed as a way of gathering research information and therefore when victims and survivors share an experience with the Truth Project, traditional research methods are not used. The process is participant led and does not utilise topic guides or interview schedules. The information shared by participants through the Truth Project is subsequently analysed by the research team to help address the research questions. Full details of the data collection and analysis process can be found in the separate *Truth Project Research: Methods* report (King and Brähler, 2019).

⁵ Comparisons between experiences across different institutions and time periods will be undertaken at a later point when we have the opportunity to carry out a fuller comparative analysis.

Table 1.1 Research themes and associated sub-questions

Theme	Associated research sub-question
Backgrounds of victims and survivors	Who has come forward to the Truth Project to share an experience of child sexual abuse?
Nature of sexual abuse experienced	What do people share about the nature of the child sexual abuse they experienced?
Institutional contexts	How much did institutions know about what was happening? What have victims and survivors said about whether anything could have been done by the institution at the time to prevent the sexual abuse?*
Disclosure	What were victims and survivors' experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse (as a child/adult) and what has helped or hindered disclosure? How were disclosures or allegations of child sexual abuse responded to by those within and outside institutions?†
Impacts of sexual abuse	What are the impacts of child sexual abuse?
Experiences of support	What has helped or hindered victims and survivors' recovery?
Victims and survivors' suggestions for change	What changes do victims and survivors suggest to improve child protection and prevent child sexual abuse in the future?

* i.e. were there features of the institution that appeared to enable or facilitate the sexual abuse?

† 'Within institutions' includes for example, police, local authorities, the criminal justice system, and the health sector.

'Outside institutions' includes for example, family and local communities.

Chapter 2

Sample and methods

This chapter provides information on the Truth Project dataset and the sampling framework used for this report. The information for this report has been gathered from experiences that victims and survivors have shared with the Truth Project between June 2016 and March 2020.

In this chapter we present key quantitative characteristics of 64 participants who had taken part in the Truth Project (in person, over the phone or by submitting a written experience) until the end of March 2020, and had specifically told us about child sexual abuse that took place within a sports context. In the rest of the report we present research findings from our qualitative analysis of 9 of those 64 Truth Project accounts. The wider analysis of Truth Project accounts is ongoing, and we will publish a full report with a bigger sample size covering all contexts of abuse at the end of the Inquiry.

The experiences of sexual abuse in sports contexts presented in this report do not all necessarily relate to current-day experiences as nearly two-thirds of the cases occurred prior to 1990. Nevertheless, we aimed to identify common themes among participants' experiences across all time periods. We recognise that the research findings included in this report do not reflect all experiences of sexual abuse in sports contexts and are only indicative of the specific experiences of those who chose to share their experiences with the Truth Project.

2.1 Sampling

Cases of child sexual abuse that occurred within a sports context were identified for analysis based on the general location of the abuse or the position of the perpetrator.

2.2 Quantitative information

Of the 3,939 people who shared an experience (in person, by phone or in writing) between June 2016 and March 2020, 64 (2 percent) described child sexual abuse that took place in a sports context (based on location or perpetrator). The majority of the cases that met these requirements (58 of the 64) reported being sexually abused by a 'sporting coach/volunteer in a sports organisation'. Sports clubs were most frequently reported as the location of the abuse (39 out of 64), however, victims and survivors also talked about other locations where sexual abuse was perpetrated by a sports coach, such as schools, recreational clubs and religious or faith-based organisations.

The most frequently mentioned sports were football (14 out of 64) and swimming (13 out of 64), followed by gymnastics (5 out of 64), water-based sports such as sailing, canoeing or boating (5 out of 64), and martial arts (5 out of 64). Other sports mentioned by more than one participant were: athletics (four participants), tennis (three participants) and squash (two participants). In addition, there were individual participants who spoke about a range of sports including: cycling, horse riding, dance, cricket, ice skating and fencing.

Table 2.1 shows some key characteristics for this group of participants.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Truth Project participants sexually abused in sports contexts

Characteristic	Category	No. of participants
Time period of sexual abuse	Pre 1970s	7
	1970s–1980s	34
	1990s–present	16
	Unknown*	7
Age when sexual abuse began†	11 years and under	37
	12 years and older	27
Sex of victim and survivor	Female	30
	Male	34
Reported illness or condition (at the time of attending the Truth Project)	Yes	24
	No	40
Ethnicity of victim and survivor	Ethnic minority	0
	White	41
	Unknown	23
Relationship of perpetrator to victim and survivor‡	Coach/volunteer in sports organisation	58
	Educational staff	6
	Other positions	5
	Church-related staff/workers	2
	Unknown	2
	Family member	1
Type of sexual abuse¶	Fondling	38
	Abuse not involving penetration	26
	Abuse involving penetration	21
	Grooming for the purposes of sexual contact	18
	Exposing children to adult sexuality	9
	Unknown	9
	Violations of privacy	8
	Exploitation	1

*As Truth Project participants are not asked direct questions and can choose how much they share in their Truth sessions or written submissions, this means that the information captured is not entirely comprehensive in all cases and some information may be unknown in individual cases.

† The age at which the sexual abuse commenced is divided into two groups: 11 years and under and 12 years and older, generally reflecting the difference between pre-pubescent and pubescent or post-pubescent age groups and the difference between primary and secondary school aged children.

‡ Numbers in this category total over 64 as some participants reported more than one perpetrator.

¶ Numbers in this category total over 64 as some participants reported more than one type of sexual abuse. All abuse reported here relates to experiences in sports contexts.

The number of male and female victims and survivors who experienced sexual abuse in sports and who have so far chosen to take part in the Truth Project are broadly similar. This is different to the findings from most previous studies into child abuse in sports that have found girls more likely to be sexually victimised than boys (see for example Vertommen et al., 2015; Alexander et al., 2011), although it is recognised that underreporting by boys and men may be an issue (Vertommen et al., 2015; Hartill, 2005).

No one in the sample who reported being from an ethnic minority talked about experiences of sexual abuse in sports (although it must be noted that there is a relatively high proportion of people in this group who did not declare their ethnicity). Again this is different from other research that has found that people from ethnic minority backgrounds may be at greater risk of abuse (Vertommen et al., 2015).

2.3 Qualitative sample and methods

The sample for qualitative analysis was selected by listing all Truth Project accounts that related to sports contexts. From this list, we selected nine accounts⁶ for in-depth analysis to ensure a range of characteristics and circumstances within each of the following categories:

- time period in which the sexual abuse occurred;
- age of victim and survivor when the sexual abuse began;
- sex of victim and survivor when the sexual abuse began; and
- type of sport and nature of sports context where the sexual abuse occurred.

Cases in the qualitative sample included sexual abuse which occurred within the following sports contexts:

- angling
- boxing
- canoeing
- football
- gymnastics
- ice skating
- swimming.

⁶ This number provides a proportion of the planned overall sample of around 70 accounts we expect to include in the full qualitative analysis work. It also reflects an appropriate proportion of the anticipated number of participants who will take part in the Truth Project before the end of the Inquiry. A complete sample of around 70 accounts is anticipated to provide a large enough number to reach 'saturation'; in a research context this refers to the point at which the addition of further accounts would not provide new categories in analysis (Katz et al., 2017; Bowen, 2008). More than 50 is considered to constitute a large sample in qualitative participant-based research (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Sandelowski, 1995).

In selecting these cases we included a range of types of sporting activities including individual competitive sport, team sport, contact and non-contact sports and those which occurred in a range of different contexts, from formally organised and run clubs to private coaching arrangements, as well as sexual abuse which occurred within public sports and leisure facilities.

In our reporting, we have not broken down our analysis by the specific type of sports context. This is because of the small numbers of participants reporting abuse in specific sports. In addition, given that we have qualitatively analysed the data in this report, such a breakdown is not suitable as the analysis is focused on overall themes and trends.

The characteristics of the qualitative sample used for this report are detailed in Table 2.2. As described above, the majority of participants described abuse that had taken place in sports contexts prior to 1990. This is reflected in the spread of the cases selected for the qualitative sample.

Table 2.2 Qualitative sample characteristics (Truth Project participants sexually abused in sports contexts)

Characteristic	Category	No. of participants
Time period of sexual abuse	Pre 1970s	3
	1970s–1980s	3
	1990s–present	3
Age when sexual abuse began	11 years and under	6
	12 years and older	3
Sex of victim and survivor	Female	4
	Male	5
Type of sports environment/situation	Sports club	6
	Sports/leisure venue	1
	Private coaching	2

No participants in the qualitative sample who were sexually abused in a sports context reported any illness or condition that affected their lives at the time they were first sexually abused as children. This is interesting given one of the largest studies examining child abuse in sports (Vertommen et al., 2015) found that children with disabilities were at significantly higher risk of interpersonal violence, which would include sexual abuse, than other groups of children.

The Framework approach was used as the method for the qualitative analysis. Further details of this approach can be found in the separate report, *Truth Project Research: Methods* (King and Brähler, 2019).

2.4 Ethics and research strengths and limitations

All social research conducted or commissioned by the Inquiry is subject to approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee.⁷ The Truth Project research is subject to rigorous ethical scrutiny as the data collected are highly personal and sensitive. In order to safeguard these data, each component of the research process was reviewed in line with strict ethical standards by the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the collection and analysis of the data.

Information is only included where Truth Project participants have agreed to their accounts being used for research purposes. All information analysed for this report was anonymised prior to analysis and all identifying information has been removed. Further information about ethics and consent can be found in Appendix B of this report.

When considering the research findings in this report, it is worth bearing in mind a number of strengths and limitations. These are summarised in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Strengths and limitations of the research

	Limitation	Strength
Qualitative analysis	Research findings are based on a small group of participant accounts	Approach emphasises lived experiences and participant voices. In-depth and detailed analysis of accounts is possible by concentrating on a smaller number
Sample	Findings are based on a self-selecting sample of those who have come forward to the Truth Project and cannot be held as representative of the general population of those sexually abused in sports contexts	Qualitative sample has been selected to present a diverse range of experiences within sports contexts
Data	Truth sessions are participant led and not all participants talk about all, or the same, aspects of child sexual abuse	Accounts reflect the issues of particular importance to participants rather than more directed accounts (if a particular structure to the session had been imposed by the interviewer)

⁷ The Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee is formed of external academics and experts as well as internal staff. The Committee is internal to the Inquiry, but independent of those commissioning and delivering its research.

Chapter 3

Child sexual abuse in sports

To help situate our research findings, this chapter sets out some terminology and key contextual information relating to sports and sports institutions.

Participation in sport, whether at school or elsewhere, is an important part of childhood and survey data demonstrate that many children in England and Wales regularly take part in sporting activities (Sport England, 2017). The 2019 findings from the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (Sport England, 2019) show that 46.8% of 5 to 16-year-olds in England took part in sport and physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more every day, with 73.1% of child participants engaging in 'sporting activities' at school at least once a week in the week preceding the survey. The survey also found that 53% of 11 to 16-year-olds reported playing team sports (the most frequently reported team sports being football, basketball, dodgeball and benchball). The latest School Sports Survey undertaken by Sport Wales (Sport Wales, 2018) showed that 48% of pupils aged between 7 and 16 years participated in extracurricular or community sport three or more times per week. In terms of sport participation in clubs outside of school, the most popular sports were football and swimming.

The range of benefits to children of participating in sport, leisure activities and play are well known and publicised (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Scottish Executive, 2003). However, evidence also suggests that some children participating in sport face harmful and abusive experiences. Over the last 20 years there has been a growing body of research conducted in the UK into child sexual abuse in sport and this type of abuse has received more attention than other forms of abuse in this context (Department of Health, 2001). However, there is more to learn as child sexual abuse in sports is still not fully understood.

The limitations on understanding are in part a result of the way in which sports institutions in England and Wales have been historically (and some remain to this day) a very private collection of organisations. This has meant that sports organisations have been responsible for developing, implementing and following their own set of child protection measures. They have been free from statutory or government accountability or regulation and were slower than other institutions to adopt child protection reforms (Brackenridge, 2001). In fact, this autonomy resulted in some sports institutions ignoring the reality of child abuse in the sector.

Child protection has become an issue in sport long after many other social themes (disability, gender and race equity, social inclusion and exclusion, and so on). However, more recently, it has risen up the social policy agenda in sport very quickly (Brackenridge, 2001).

Violence in sport frequently intersects with other forms of maltreatment and abuse (Lang et al., 2018). Traditionally, 'violence within sport' has been defined quite broadly and in the context of sport, it may include sexual abuse, undue training pressure or strict diets, drug administration, physical abuse and psychological abuse (Brackenridge et al., 2010). More recently, the child protection 'movement' in sport has also begun to include a range of additional harms to children including: physical and psychological abuse; neglect and damaging hazing (initiation) rituals; early specialisation; intensive training; child labour; gender harassment; bullying, and financial and commercial exploitation (Lang and Hartill, 2015).

3.1 Defining sport and sports contexts

There is no overall agreed and consistent way in which sports and sports institutions are defined within policy, governance and academic literature. Sport, as it is known today, exists at different levels of intensity: from the elite, international or Olympic standard down to recreational, leisure and ad hoc participation (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2014). The lack of settled definition and the wide range of activities that could be included within the scope of sports highlights the complexity of examining institutional and sexual abuse within sport.

A wide definition of 'sport' is provided by Brackenbridge:

Sport is defined as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include play, recreation, casual, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports or games.

(Brackenridge et al., 2010)

Many existing studies focus on sports that are organised and regulated, meaning that 'ad hoc play' is excluded.

Sport England and Sport Wales do not provide a definition of what constitutes a 'sport'. However, they do operate a 'recognition' process to establish which sports fall under their scope for regulation, support and funding. Through this recognition process, the Councils determine which national governing bodies are responsible for governing specific sporting activities.

There is huge diversity in the nature and set up of sports clubs and activities operating in England and Wales, each with their own ways of working. They range from very small grass roots community clubs through to sporting organisations affiliated with national governing bodies. There is no set way in which sports clubs or organisations are structured or organised and governance arrangements vary widely. The Sports Councils' Code for Sports Governance was launched in 2016. Its purpose is to improve transparency, accountability and financial integrity of sports organisations. Organisations can be measured against three tiers of set standards ranging from minimal mandatory governance to top level governance. These standards apply to every organisation, regardless of size and state that each organisation should be governed by a Board, who should oversee the administration and application of policy, including child protection measures. However, not all sports organisations will apply for sports council recognition and may therefore lack structured governance systems. Only those sports that are recognised (and therefore funded) by the sports councils and UK Sport⁸ are required to have a designated person responsible for child protection policies.

In this report we define 'sports contexts' as environments and situations where children and young people take part in organised sports activities (including alongside adult participants). For example this could be in sports clubs, sports institutions or sports associations or where children participate in sporting activity in a sporting or leisure location (for example, a public swimming pool) and the perpetrator works or volunteers there (for example, a leisure centre worker or swimming pool lifeguard).

⁸ UK Sport provides strategic investment to enable Great Britain's Olympic and Paralympic sports. UK Sport has a very clear remit at the 'top end' of Britain's sporting pathway, supporting athletes and sports to compete and win medals at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. UK Sport has no direct involvement in community or school sport.

We include environments and situations where there is an element of institutional oversight or governance (described further below) and where the institution or governing body is specifically set up for sport (for example, a youth cricket team, a Saturday morning gymnastics club). Sports clubs or activities run as subsidiary activities to the core business of another institution (such as a football club in the Cubs and Scouts, or an after-school athletics club run by the school) are not included. This is because the overseeing authority (and primary function of the institution) in those circumstances would be a different institution type. So, for example, if a child reported being abused at a football club run by the Scouts, any reporting and official handling of sexual abuse allegations should be dealt with by the Scouts rather than say, the Football Association. These cases will still be included in our overall analysis of Truth Project data but are considered under a different institution type.

Before going on to discuss the development of child protection within sports, it is first necessary to note the way in which sport, as an institution, has provided opportunities for sexual abuse to occur.

3.2 Sports contexts: opportunities for abuse

As within other contexts such as healthcare settings, religious institutions and schools, sport can provide adults with unsupervised access to children. While much research on harm in sport has tended to focus on coaches as the main perpetrators (and the most frequently spoken about perpetrators in the Truth data in sports contexts were coaches), it is important to understand that abuse can also be committed by other authority figures who play a role in the sport (Brackenridge, 2001), such as senior or established sports peers or even other peer athletes (Alexander et al., 2011). Sport encourages or necessitates physical contact with children, and often involves this as part of the activity itself. This normalisation of physical contact provides an opportunity for adults to have contact with children in such a way that does not raise suspicion. For example, coaches can shift the interpersonal physical boundaries from acceptable and legitimate touching (for example to correct technique) to the inappropriate and abusive (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Lang and Hartill, 2015).

This is particularly problematic when coupled with the notion that coaches (and likewise other sports leaders) are often authority figures. They can be seen as being in positions of power, and thus are unchallengeable (Brackenridge et al., 2010). The importance of power within the coach-athlete relationship has been well documented by research (Gervis and Dunn, 2004). Children can spend a large amount of time with coaches or trainers and therefore develop a private and exclusive coach or instructor relationship (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Like other forms of relationships between adults and children within institutions, the potential for abuse increases in situations where intense relationships exist between children or young people and adults who have considerable influence over them (Alexander et al., 2011).

Moreover, vulnerability to abuse can also increase when the activity involves spending time away from home (at sporting events, for example). This is often when children are left without parental supervision (Farstad, 2007) and where the sports coach or trainer is acting 'in loco parentis' (Alexander et al., 2011). The isolation away from caregivers or parents can not only provide an opportunity for abuse, but also decrease the chances of disclosure.

Research findings vary on which groups of children are more vulnerable to abuse but those performing at elite and sub-elite might be at increased risk of some forms of abuse (Fasting et al., 2010). It has been said that children who fall into this category present a particular vulnerability to abuse as they are often treated as adults as opposed to children (Brackenridge et al., 2010).

Although children involved at all levels of sport can be treated in similar ways to adults, elite and high-performing athletes may be less likely to disclose abuse due to the extent of the potential impact on their careers and the hard work they have invested in the sport. This is problematic as other adults may overlook potential harms committed towards a child by valuing coaches and instructors over the wellbeing of the child and in many cases valuing performance over child safety (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Moreover, these children rely on the coach (and indeed the power and authority of the coach) to progress within the sport which may lead to future career potential. Children may fear disclosing sexual abuse if they believe this would jeopardise their potential for success, a fear which is emphasised in high-performance environments (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

However, it is important to note that other factors can also increase a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse in sports (Stevens, 2019; Lang et al., 2018). One of the largest studies in the field of sports more recently also found that ethnic minority, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and disabled athletes were at significantly higher risk of all forms of interpersonal violence (including sexual abuse) than other groups (Vertommen et al., 2015). This is a similar finding to those who are more likely to experience sexual abuse in all settings, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and disabled adults more likely to have experienced abuse before the age of 16 years (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Despite the opportunities provided by participation in sport, the main opportunity for sexual abuse within this context is arguably provided by the culture surrounding sporting institutions. These are institutions that by their very nature are open to broader cultural influences that provide opportunities for sexual abuse than other institutions, such as education and religion, for example (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). For example, sports institutions can foster a culture of silence, feelings of shame and embarrassment which are linked to gendered norms. This is not surprising when strength and aggression are viewed as essential qualities of the male athlete (Lang et al., 2018). Thus, disclosure of abuse and especially abuse of a sexual nature may be associated with weakness and lack of masculinity (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). This is particularly interesting given the concern about sexual abuse within sports was first raised following a feminist movement and the concern that male coaches abused female vulnerability (Fasting et al., 2004).

3.3 The development of child protection in sport

Current national and international legal and policy frameworks provide guidance and regulate the many different institutions that provide sport services to children (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, formal regulation of child protection within sports has been particularly absent for a long time.

In the 1980s, there were many reported cases of sexual, physical and emotional abuse in sport, but very few were publicised and very limited studies were undertaken (Brackenridge, 2001).

At the start of the 1990s, research began to be developed to explore child protection policies, training programmes and interventions (NCF/NSPCC, 1996). However, the real focus on the agenda of child protection awareness within sport resulted from increased media attention and political pressure following the arrest and conviction of several high-profile sports coaches for serious and systematic sexual abuse of children.

Perhaps the most high profile of these was in 1995, when former British Olympic swimming coach, Paul Hickson, was jailed for 17 years for the rape of two teenage swimmers and the indecent assault of many other children. Hickson had denied abusing teenagers over a 15-year period when he ran training clubs between 1976 and 1991. The case was said to be “*a defining moment in the history of sexual exploitation in sport*” (Brackenridge, 2001). Following this, and after a number of years of pressure on government sport authorities by those with little power, such as sports development officers, parents and club officials, a National Child Protection in Sport Task Force was convened by Sport England in 1999 (Brackenridge, 2004). This represented a significant breakthrough in the strategic efforts to deal with sexual exploitation in sport.

In the late 1990s, child protection initiatives began to slowly develop among frontline sport delivery groups. This led, in 2001, to the development of the jointly-funded NSPCC and Sport England Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), which formed the first government-backed agency with responsibility for safeguarding and child protection in sport (Boocock, 2002).

Shortly after its development, the CPSU began implementing a Task Force Action Plan by providing sports organisations and national governing bodies with resources and training on child protection, whistleblowing, codes of conduct and inclusion (Lang and Hartill, 2015). The CPSU was also commissioned by Sport Wales (the main advisory body to the Welsh Government on sport) to help implement a set of standards for sports organisations in Wales.

In 2002, the CPSU published a set of standards for child protection for national governing bodies to work towards if they wanted to continue to receive government funding. These standards were designed to provide a framework to help create a safe sporting environment for children and young people and protect them from harm (CPSU, 2006). The Standards require national governing bodies to have a designated person, with the appropriate level of seniority within an organisation, to have overall responsibility for the implementation of child protection policies, both at club or facility (local) level and at national governing body level (CPSU, 2006). In 2012 the CPSU developed a further framework that aimed to support and encourage the maintenance and embedding of child protection policies for those organisations that had already met the required standards (Lang and Hartill, 2015). The standards were updated in 2018 to bring them in line with more current legislation, government guidance and safeguarding practice (CPSU, 2018).

The development of the CPSU, as the government-backed agency, was soon followed by law and policy guidance aimed at further strengthening the wider protection of children from sexual abuse. In insisting that safeguarding children is ‘everyone’s responsibility’, the then Department for Education and Skills launched the Every Child Matters agenda alongside the enactment of the Children Act 2004 (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). The Children Act 2004 made it clear that all sectors of society, including sport, have a responsibility for safeguarding and protecting children, and voluntary- and private-sector organisations, including those in sport, are required to have safeguarding measures in place.

In 2007, UNICEF provided further guidance on strengthening existing child protection. Providing an approach dedicated to increasing awareness, UNICEF highlighted the holistic and coordinated role of parents, teachers, coaches and other caregivers, as well as the media, in developing and implementing standards for the protection and wellbeing of child athletes. This development also sought to improve data collection and research to aid in the collection of empirical evidence on which to base understandings of abuse within sports (Brackenridge et al., 2010). This was further highlighted by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2010 which stressed the importance of robust and appropriate codes of practice within sports, focusing on the training and education of staff to provide them with the tools on how to report concerns (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

In 2015, the Government published a sport strategy *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*, which focused on the importance of sports inclusion and on the positive impact engagement in sports had on individuals in relation to physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development (HM Government, 2015). However, the media continued to question whether child welfare and safety within sports were being taken seriously, and if cases of abuse were being overlooked because the culture of 'sports success' and 'desire to win' took precedence. As part of the Sporting Future strategy, an independent review into the duty of care in sport was commissioned. The subsequent report made a number of recommendations with a view to raising the profile of 'duty of care' (defined broadly to include personal safety and injury, mental health and other support) and increasing industry-wide adoption of improved standards (Grey-Thompson, 2017).

Despite these governmental efforts, the media reported on further sexual abuse scandals within sports, and more particularly, abuse within professional football. Regardless of this media attention, at the time many of those at the head of sporting organisations continued to demonstrate unhelpful attitudes towards allegations being made and continued to perceive sexual abuse as a societal problem rather than one that sport itself could address (Brackenridge, 2001). However, by the mid-2010s most sports organisations seemed to have acknowledged that child protection was part of their remit and accepted the role that sports culture can play in perpetuating and concealing sexual abuse.

In November 2016, Andy Woodward, a former player for Crewe Alexandra FC, was one of the first professional football players to discuss publicly his experience of sexual abuse within sports. He revealed he was sexually abused as a child by former coach Barry Bennell. Following this public disclosure, the NSPCC set up a hotline with the Football Association dedicated to helping footballers who had experienced sexual abuse and more than 860 calls were received in the first week. Andy Woodward's disclosure was followed by those of Steve Walters and Chris Unsworth, two former youth team players who also disclosed they were sexually abused by Bennell. Also in 2016, Paul Stewart,⁹ another former professional player, disclosed that he had experienced sexual abuse at the hands of his youth team coach, Frank Roper.

⁹ As co-founder of a charity supporting sexual abuse victims, Paul Stewart was also a participant in the Inquiry's seminar into mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse (Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse, 2019).

In the latter part of 2016, the extent of the poor attitude to disclosures shown by some institutions was highlighted when it was reported that some footballers had been paid to not disclose further instances of abuse. These high-profile cases and the intense media focus on Barry Bennell led to Manchester City and Chelsea football clubs initially launching internal reviews that later developed into independent reviews into non-recent abuse.

Similarly, the football associations for England and Scotland (The Football Association and the Scottish Football Association), also launched independent reviews into child sexual abuse in the sport. In 2018 it was announced that the conclusion and findings of The Football Association review would be delayed due to pending court action and further allegations in the Barry Bennell case. Although the publication of the final report of the Scottish Football Association has also been delayed to avoid prejudicing criminal proceedings, their interim report described how poor governance, over-complex structures and lack of leadership in relation to protecting children from sexual abuse had contributed to the risk posed to young people in Scottish football. The report also made 96 recommendations for change, highlighting the need for additional funding and resources; that concerns should never be ignored for fear of club reputations; and that extensive cultural change is needed within the sport to help identify early signs of abuse and openly combat the stigma around gender, sexuality and mental health (Independent Review of Sexual Abuse in Scottish Football, 2018).

Finally, as part of their extensive Inquiry into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Australian Royal Commission published their report on sports and recreation institutions in 2017, also making a number of recommendations for change (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). In particular the report set out ten Child Safe Standards that articulate the essential standards of a child safe institution. Similar to the Scottish Football Association review, the Royal Commission stressed the importance of improving communication, raising community awareness, increasing funding and providing better resources as being key to improving the level afforded to protect children from sexual abuse.

This chapter has set out key contextual information relating to sports and sports institutions, providing an overview of the culture, policy and practice against which the research findings in this report can be understood. This thematic report extends the previous work examining child sexual abuse in sports by presenting an analysis of the experiences of victims and survivors who were abused in sports contexts in the past and who participated in the Inquiry's Truth Project. The report shares their voices to enhance understanding of how this abuse took place and the impacts it has had upon their lives.

Chapter 4

Backgrounds of children sexually abused in sports contexts

This chapter provides a description of the family and early life backgrounds of the participants and the role that sport played in their childhoods. It helps address the research sub-question:

- Who has come forward to the Truth Project to share an experience of child sexual abuse in a sports context?

4.1 Participants' backgrounds, families and childhoods

Participants described coming from a range of family and social backgrounds and experiencing a variety of domestic circumstances before, during and after they were sexually abused in sports contexts. Some came from stable and supportive families and described generally happy childhoods and having good friends, while others talked about their unstable homes and disrupted families, resulting from bereavement, divorce or other family breakdown.

“ I guess you could describe it in some ways, my upbringing was in some ways privileged but quite unsteady. There was always some disruption and something unstable ... it happens to people from all walks of life as well ... I think my friends look at me – they did, they called me all sorts of names, none of them too complimentary around what I am, my upbringing, they perceive me in a certain way, and in actual fact, that's nothing like it. It just happens to people from all backgrounds.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants described a range of difficult domestic experiences as children, including their family experiencing poverty and, for some, the challenges their mothers faced as a single parent. Some participants grew up in circumstances where one of their parents experienced mental health difficulties. Additionally, some participants either witnessed domestic abuse or were directly subject to domestic violence and abuse, including physical, sexual and psychological abuse and neglect.

“ My father was an alcoholic, used to beat all the children up, my brothers and – well, I had two brothers

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

One participant who was physically, sexually and psychologically abused at home explained how this made her particularly vulnerable to further abuse outside of the home. For example she experienced abuse if she did not do as she was told by adults:

“ So yes of an early age I was kind of taught that it was silly to say no to things.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some participants lacked parental supervision, in their lives generally or at the time of the abuse, for example one participant relayed how they were neglected at home and were “*free to roam the streets*” [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context] leaving them isolated and alone. Others were allowed to visit or stay over at the perpetrator’s home. One participant described how he was the only child at the sports club he attended who did not have a father (his father had died when the participant was very young) and how he also lacked a positive male role model in his life:

“ ... I was the one there without the dad, and it was my mum who was taking me along, and I was probably more vulnerable in many ways than a lot of the other kids there.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

4.2 The role of sport in participants’ lives as children

For a few participants, engaging in sporting activities offered a diversion or escape from difficulties at home or school. One participant shared how his parents’ acrimonious divorce, and the consequent involvement of social services, drove him to find ways to stay away from home. He would visit the perpetrator’s house, both alone and with other boys, as well as play the sport he enjoyed as an escape from the difficulties at home. Another participant explained how he was generally unhappy and would truant from school, going along to the sports venue during the day instead, where he was befriended by the perpetrator.

One participant relayed how joining the sports club meant he was not hanging about on the streets and had somewhere safe to go in his free time:

“ My mum said her friend was working as the leader there. I thought it was always a safe environment for me to go into rather than be on the streets, obviously. I mean a club [for boys] if – you know, you’re going to be safe. And, as I say, [Perpetrator] was a friend of my mum’s.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

However, for most participants their engagement with sport was simply part of wider activities in their lives as children and taking part in sport was nothing more than a hobby or a fun thing to do for entertainment. The sport was not typically a dominant feature of the children’s lives or that of their families, although several participants first became involved in the sport where the abuse occurred because their siblings attended the club or activity. One participant also talked about the links that were established between their family and the perpetrator’s family as a result of participating in the sport:

“ So, over the years, as I was becoming more serious about [sport], I got to know his family, he got to know my family. My sister had lessons with him as well.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

This participant was also trained by the perpetrator’s wife in particular elements of the sport, increasing the connection between their respective families.

Most of the participants enjoyed participating in sport but not at an elite or highly competitive level; only one participant was a high performer in a particular sport and had one-to-one coaching. Another participant performed well and was placed in a position of responsibility in the respective sport by the perpetrator which meant he was given the opportunity to travel and be involved in different events and experiences.

In summary, the information shared by participants showed that their backgrounds and family circumstances were varied, and some had particular vulnerabilities that were known to the adults in sports contexts who went on to abuse them. Sport for almost all participants was simply a pastime activity, something they regularly engaged in and enjoyed, but was not a dominant feature in their lives or those of their families. This is in contrast to the elite or high-performing child athletes often reported in the media who have been sexually abused in situations where sport was central to their lives, or where perpetrators exploited the power and control they held over those victims and survivors by virtue of the impact they could have on the child's future career and achievement in the sport.

Chapter 5

Context and nature of the child sexual abuse

This chapter details the context and nature of the sexual abuse participants experienced in sports. Information is provided about the locations, timing and nature of the sexual abuse as well as details of who the perpetrators were and their roles within the sports institutions. It addresses the research sub-question:

- What do people share about the nature of the child sexual abuse they experienced in sports contexts?

5.1 Perpetrators

In sports contexts the abuse was perpetrated by coaches, both club coaches and those privately engaged, as well as instructors and other adults working in sporting facilities. None of the participants described experiencing any harmful sexual behaviour from other children in this context and there were no known female perpetrators in the qualitative sample or the dataset as a whole at the point the final data analysis for this report took place.

Some perpetrators also held other positions of trust and responsibility in the community, for example as a magistrate or a bailiff. Several also held other positions working or volunteering with children outside of the sports context, including in youth work, military cadets and as a school board member. These roles meant perpetrators were well known in the community and had regular access to children. As one participant described it, the man who abused him, *“had a fair bit of sway”* in the local and sporting community [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context].

Three perpetrators were known to have abused other children, either around the same time as the participants or previously. Victims and survivors knew this as they had found out later that the perpetrator had been convicted of sexual offences against children, had been told at the time by other victims they were also being abused or had directly witnessed the abuse of others. Other victims included the participants' siblings, school friends, other children involved with the sport and members of the perpetrators' own families. One participant described how her older sister was also abused and tried hard to protect her:

“ [Sister] was older, so she had a much more idea, or feelings about what was happening, I'd say. So, the dynamic at the time was also – always her trying to be protective.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Although none of the participants in this sample were abused by more than one individual in a sports context, some of them were aware that the perpetrator was associated with others who were also known to have abused children or were suspected to have done so. For example, one participant described how the sports coach who abused him was close friends with another man who had previously led the club and who was commonly suspected to have been abusing boys in his care.

As referred to in the previous chapter, some of the victims and survivors were particularly vulnerable at the time they were abused in sports contexts, and for some sport was a diversion from problems at home. Some perpetrators exploited the vulnerabilities of children from disadvantaged or poor families, for example by taking them on trips or buying them sweets their families could not afford, as the following quotes illustrate:

“ So, initially it was like, I think more of, we came from a poor family, so it was like, “Oh, let’s bring the children involved with the Youth Services, and they will come here”. And then after all of them, sort of like, with him being involved and teaching us [two sports], and being at the youth centre, he then would say, “Oh, I’ll take them on a pantomime...”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ never had sweets or treats though because we had nothing ... And it was all about giving sweets and doing things to me through having sweets...”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

5.2 Location and timing of abuse

Participants relayed how the sexual abuse took place in a variety of locations, both within and outside of sports locations. Within sports locations sexual abuse took place in communal or public spaces such as changing rooms, swimming pools and sports halls, sometimes covertly while other people were present. One participant described how, as a key holder for the sporting venue, the perpetrator took them to isolated and lockable rooms to carry out the abuse.

One perpetrator would hold one-to-one trials for prospective club members, which the participant he abused saw as a way of testing how the individual children reacted to him and assessing their vulnerabilities, making them “*easy targets*” [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context].

Although sexual abuse took place in sports locations and venues it also often occurred outside of these, in the perpetrator’s home or car, as the following participant recounts:

“ it [the abuse] involved me being alone with him, in a car, and et cetera. And he would – and then staying over at his house as well, even taking me away for one weekend.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some perpetrators invited groups of children to their home to attend meetings, play computer games or watch films but would then wait until the participant was alone and then sexually abuse them.

Another participant explained how the perpetrator abused her in her own home after driving her back from sports training:

“ So one time, he drove me home and then he invited himself in and stripped and kissed me and took my top off and grabbed my behind.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The perpetration of sexual abuse while on trips out with the perpetrator, both day and overnight trips, was common. Abuse also occurred during visits to, or overnight stays at, the perpetrator's home. Some perpetrators appeared to create opportunities to abuse, for example by offering to take children on excursions or giving them lifts home after activities. Several perpetrators actively approached victims and survivors' parents asking to take them (and usually their siblings) out, often completely unrelated to the sporting activity. It is possible that parents may have felt an increased sense of security in the arrangements given the children were not going alone as an individual with another adult, however, in reality both children were being abused by the perpetrator in these circumstances. In the following quote the participant explains how she and her sibling would try to avoid having to go out with the perpetrator:

“ We used to try and do a lot to like, for him not to take us out. Silly little things like, we'd put our heads against a radiator so, kind of like, we had a temperature, or stuff like that.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Several participants described how the sexual abuse started after they were taken out by the perpetrator or stayed overnight at his home for the first time:

“ My older brother [name] and I had [sport] lessons at [location and name of sports venue] and we were part of the [sports club]. [Perpetrator] gave my brother [sport] lessons and he came to the family home to ask permission to take both of us on a trip to [city]. My abuse started on the trip to [city], but my brother was already being molested.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The following account describes how the perpetrator took advantage of the fact that the participant's parents were going away for a short holiday and that he wanted to stay behind to attend a sporting event. The perpetrator offered for the participant to stay at his home and when he arrived there told him that they would have to share a bed:

“ And he had - there was a bedroom there, which was a single bedroom - and there was another bedroom there which was his bedroom, and then there weren't any other beds. And I said, “Oh, good night.” And I went to walk in there and he said, “No, you're not sleeping in there.” I said, “What?” He said, “No, you've got to get in with me, that's [Person]'s room.” And there was a fella lived with him, [Person]. So I thought, “Oh, whatever” you know. It'll be like he'll be one side; I'll be the other. Anyway, I went into his bed. And, obviously I had to get undressed. I got in bed. And then as I closed my eyes, this hand just came over, and started to touch me.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

5.3 Nature of abuse

Participants spoke of being subjected to a wide range of sexually abusive behaviour. While some participants chose not to discuss the particular nature of the abuse they experienced, some described contact abuse such as touching, fondling, kissing, oral sexual abuse and digital penetration and some recounted experiencing non-contact abuse including being shown pornographic films, having indecent images made of them or receiving sexual text messages.

There were also some examples of the sexual abuse being perpetrated under the guise of sporting activity. For example one participant described how she was abused while swimming:

“ ... at the [swimming centre], it would always be, he would take us swimming, he would always try and perform, or do stuff under the water, acting like he’s teaching me to swim.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another described how the abuse sometimes took place in the foam pit of the gymnastics club during games of hide and seek.

Grooming children, either prior to the abuse or as a way to prevent them from telling anyone, was common. Perpetrators used a range of techniques and approaches. Typical early stage grooming behaviours, such as targeting and befriending individual children, building trust, fulfilling a need in the child and isolating them from family and friends, have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 4. Typical later stage grooming behaviours, such as unnecessary or excessive physical contact, making inappropriate and sexualised comments or showing children pornographic material, were also evident in participants’ accounts. These actions served to introduce or normalise sexualised contact and behaviour between the perpetrator and child and made it difficult for some participants to understand that what the perpetrator was doing was wrong.

“ Around the time when I was 14, he started making comments, I didn’t really think anything of it, during my lessons. That then progressed, around the time when I was in work experience was the first time that I would say anything actually that probably crossed a line. And then after that, things sort of escalated.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ He was quite a touchy, feely person, which at the training you – I can picture him putting his arm around kids and stuff like that. He did it with me.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ And there was, there was – one – I actually spoke to me mum about – there was one occasion when I was sat on a chair and he come behind me and sort of started to massage me shoulder. And I went to me mum and I said about it. And she said, “Oh, it’s nothing, you’re just imagining it” you know, “It’s nothing to worry about. I know him, he’s fine.” So I never thought about it again.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ I guess the way how it happens ... it was step by step and grooming, so there wasn't the immediate transition where you think, “Oh, my God, that's completely abnormal”. He sort of built it. But as a kid, you're not taught what's abnormal ... But because the transition was so gradual, I didn't even actually see it as – even though I kind of knew in the back of my head it was wrong, it wasn't abnormal, because of the process, if you like, if you want to call it something.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

As introduced above, some perpetrators appeared to actively exploit the children's vulnerabilities in order to groom and abuse them. They did this, for example, by taking them out to the cinema, the pantomime or the seaside; trips and treats their parents could not afford. They would also pay the child particular attention, giving them compliments and praise. One participant explained how the perpetrator paid her attention and seemed to care, affection she was lacking at home, making her feel special:

“ Well I must be special because he's doing it to me.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some perpetrators gave the children they abused particular privileges within the sports club, such as allowing them to play with older children or in better teams for example. One participant described how he was given a position of power and responsibility within the sports club which increased the amount of time he had to spend with the perpetrator, and in less supervised environments; the perpetrator then frequently organised sports club meetings at his home and took the participant away on numerous trips, both nationally and internationally.

“ And that, the sad part is I had lovely times there and all. You know, as a kid to get to do some of the things I did ... As much as he was abusing me, he'd then put me in positions of power. So, I'd go on conferences, and he'd turn up and he was going on that conference. You know, always had me in his sights.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some perpetrators used threats to prevent their victims disclosing the abuse, threatening them that they would be hurt or killed if they told anyone. They instilled feelings of fear and guilt in the children, making them feel they were the ones to blame for the abuse. One participant described how she felt she was 'coached' into believing the abuse was all her fault.

5.4 Duration of abuse and when the abuse ended

Participants experienced sexual abuse in sports contexts which lasted between a few months up to several years in duration. For most participants the abuse began once they first became involved in the sporting activity, however, one participant described how she had known the perpetrator for several years before he began to sexually abuse her.

“ I think I had had him as a coach since I was about 11 or 12. And at that point, yes, I was just a kid. It was only by the time that I think I was late 14 that I realised there was something odd. I just sort of dismissed it because he was that sort of playful, chatty personality, joking around, everyone’s friend. You sort of dismiss it until you can’t dismiss it.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants described several reasons why the abuse eventually ended. For some this was only after they disclosed the abuse or another victim and survivor did so. Others left the organisation or context in which they had contact with the perpetrator. Two participants explained how the abuse stopped after they witnessed the perpetrator abusing another child. One participant explained how he went round to the perpetrator’s house one day, found his friend in the perpetrator’s bed and the perpetrator invited him to join them. He left immediately and never had any contact with the perpetrator thereafter. Another participant relayed how she witnessed the perpetrator abusing another child on a trip out:

“ I went on two [named sports club] coach trips – to the pantomime and to the seaside. On the latter trip I was walking down the coach and saw [perpetrator] with his hand down another girl’s knickers. She was about the same age as me then, 8 years old. I didn’t have anything to do with him after that.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

As described in section 5.3 above, some participants experienced psychological and emotional abuse linked to grooming and manipulation by the perpetrator. None of the participants described experiencing physical or other forms of abuse by perpetrators in sports contexts.

These research findings regarding the nature and location of sexual abuse in sports contexts are similar to those described by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia (2017). The Commission reported that perpetrators in sports contexts targeted young athletes with vulnerabilities, including those experiencing difficulties at home and family breakdown, and that abuse in similar locations in sports venues as well as the perpetrator’s home was also common. The Commission report also refers to perpetrators being able to gain unsupervised access to children, including outside of the sports context and children being able to stay overnight at perpetrators’ homes (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Chapter 6

Institutional context and knowledge of the child sexual abuse

This chapter describes the characteristics and features of sports contexts and how these facilitated the perpetration of child sexual abuse. It considers what knowledge adults and managers in sports contexts and others had about abuse that was occurring at the time. In doing so, this chapter explores the research sub-questions:

- How much did institutions know about what was happening?
- What have victims and survivors said about whether anything could have been done by the institutions at the time to prevent the sexual abuse?

6.1 Sport context characteristics

Participants' descriptions of the sports contexts where they experienced child sexual abuse present a diverse range of environments and characteristics. Some sports clubs appeared to be more formally organised while others were very informal and casually run. For example one club was set up and arranged through a local community business related to the sport, which meant there was no real regulation or monitoring of any activities involving children and no known vetting of adults involved. In that particular case the perpetrator was later found to have had numerous previous sexual offence convictions before taking on the role of coach and going on to abuse the participant. Private coaching arrangements between parents and coaches in some instances meant there was limited external supervision or control over the perpetrator and the work he carried out.

One participant described how the sports community in which she was involved was 'very gossipy' and how this impacted on how her disclosure of abuse was responded to when it became known in the wider community:

“ But in the [sport] community at large, there's – there was a case I think a few years before mine, where there was a 17-year-old girl dating her 22-year-old coach or something. So a lot of people had opinions on that. And I think apparently, that fed into what I was doing and sort of saying, what if it was this? So whenever you have these sorts of sports communities or things like that, it's always very gossipy.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

6.2 Enabling characteristics of sports contexts

Several institutional factors were identified which enabled the sexual abuse to occur within sports contexts. Several participants described how the perpetrator was easily able to contact their parents outside of the sports club and make private arrangements to take the children out. Children, both in groups and individually, were able to visit the perpetrator's home and in some cases stay overnight there. Informal arrangements meant vetting checks were not carried out and coaches working on a self-employed basis had a lot of freedom and lack of supervision and regulation.

Even in more formally organised clubs and activities, inappropriate behaviour was able to take place and nothing was done. In the following quote the participant describes the extent of the inappropriate behaviour which was allowed to happen as the perpetrator and the other adult abuser were running the club themselves:

“ Like, say you'd be on a – on any, sort of, residential trip, they'd be running in showers, taking pictures of the children naked, whilst they were having a shower. And it was all done out of like a laugh and joke. There'd be porn watching, at that time the internet had just come, sort of, in, especially to the young people. And there'd be a lot of porn watching, and the computers and the websites and I'd say that was more or less, encouraged.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

As discussed in Chapter 5, perpetrators also had easy access to isolated and unsupervised areas within sports venues in which to perpetrate the abuse.

6.3 Institutional and wider knowledge at the time

Although most participants did not formally disclose or report the abuse to the sports institution at the time, some participants' accounts demonstrated that both the sports and other institutions knew about the abuse or had suspicions. In several cases there were clear indications something was wrong and nothing proactive was done about it to protect children from abuse.

One participant described how there were clear indications of concern in her behaviour at school but that the school and local authority did nothing to prevent the ongoing abuse by the perpetrator who was abusing her in a sports context.

“ I remember doing strange little things as a little girl, and going and asking my year six teacher, “What was rape?” and etc like that ... so then I started writing, but I think I was just trying to express and tell someone.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Looking back, other participants also thought adults should have been aware of, and reacted to, their change in behaviour as children as an indicator that they were being abused. Some participants spoke of how they really wanted adults to ask or prompt them about what was going on:

“ I think, to be honest, I'd been waiting for a few weeks for someone to just ask me, outright.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

In terms of wider knowledge at the time of the abuse, participants discussed how concerning behaviour by the perpetrator or other adults in the sports context was known among other children or suspicions and concerns were held by other adults external to that context, such as parents and other members of the community. One participant explained how inappropriate behaviour by one of the adults in the sports club led to rumour and joking among the children:

“ Like I say, everyone had a feeling about [it] to say, that night, “You’re sleeping next to [other adult perpetrator]”, so I weren’t – but like, you know. And it was funny to them all. “You’ve got [other adult perpetrator], you’re sleeping next to [other adult perpetrator]”, and they’d sort of laugh about it.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

In another case concerns about the perpetrator, known in the wider community, led to the participant’s mother being warned about his contact with the perpetrator in the club. She subsequently questioned the participant about it, prompting his disclosure of the abuse.

Some participants explained that their parents developed suspicions that something was wrong, either through hearing concerns about the perpetrator or the club or by witnessing changes in their child’s behaviour, as these quotes illustrate:

“ Well, she knew him as well. She was the one who took me there every day. I think she had some idea that something was wrong. Obviously, I think my behaviour had changed and it was just – yes. But I don’t think she really knew what was going on.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ But I hadn’t told anyone at that point. My mum I think, had sat down with me and [sister] and asked us, but we didn’t say anything to her.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants also referred to other adults being aware of concerns within the sports context or about the specific perpetrator but nothing proactive appears to have been done about them. For example one participant described how he told the parent of another child at the club, and other (unknown) people, that another adult there attempted to sexually abuse him but nothing was done to find out more from the participant or to remove the perpetrator from the club:

“ I told [another child at the club]’s mum and all that. I’m sure I told a few people and they just didn’t – it didn’t register ...

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant described how it was possible the perpetrator’s wife was aware something was wrong as a result of the way she reacted when the perpetrator brought her to their home:

“ I always remember his wife being at the house ... and her being really upset.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

One participant was aware that prior to the abuse he experienced by one leader in a sports club, the parents of another child wanted to report the other leader of the club (and a close friend of the leader who abused the participant) for abusing their son. The same participant also became aware later that his own father had been worried about sending him to the club as this other previous leader had been a known child abuser. Despite these concerns, no additional protection mechanisms appear to have been put in place to monitor what was going on at the club when the participant himself began attending.

The accounts shared revealed little about the presence of any features of the sports contexts that offered protection from child sexual abuse.

Participants' accounts referred to institutional knowledge of the abuse at the time. Additionally, other children and adults in the wider community knew about the abuse or held strong suspicions about the perpetrator but few acted in response.

The accounts of the participants described in this chapter emphasise that there were indications of concern about what was going on in the sports context, either as a result of victims and survivors' behaviour at the time, via direct or indirect disclosure or through rumour and suspicion about particular adults operating in those environments. However, these indications were not always explored or addressed, meaning that the sexual abuse was able to continue and victims and survivors came to further harm.

The institutional characteristics and structures (or lack of them) that increased the risk of sexual victimisation in sports contexts discussed in this chapter were common to those found in other inquiries and research. For example, the Australian Royal Commission report also refers to sports institutions engaging unchecked and unaccountable leaders (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). The Interim Report of the Independent Review of Sexual Abuse in Scottish Football also refers to adults having a level of awareness or suspicion about inappropriate or concerning behaviour by perpetrators in football and there being limited evidence of any direct action being taken to address this (Independent Review of Sexual Abuse in Scottish Football, 2018).

Chapter 7

Experiences of disclosure and responses by institutions

The first part of this chapter presents information about participants' experiences of disclosing their abuse, both as children and as adults. It details how the disclosures were responded to by institutions and individuals and describes the impact of those responses upon the participants. The barriers to disclosure shared by participants are also reported. The second part of the chapter describes participants' experiences of the police and criminal justice system after disclosing or reporting the abuse.

The research sub-questions addressed in this chapter are:

- What were victims and survivors' experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse (as a child/adult) that occurred in sports contexts and what has helped or hindered disclosure?
- How were disclosures or allegations of child sexual abuse in sports contexts responded to by those within and outside institutions?

7.1 Experiences of disclosure and impacts as a child

A key theme discussed by participants was how much they wanted, or tried, to tell someone about what was happening to them as a child but how difficult this was. Four participants directly disclosed the sexual abuse when they were children, sometimes to more than one adult. Most disclosed to their mothers but disclosures were also made to the parent of another child at the sports club and a member of the perpetrator's family. One participant refers to disclosing to several undefined individuals over a period of years. Only two disclosures were made to individuals connected with the sport: one participant told the parent of another child at the club and another participant disclosed to their mother, who then reported the abuse to the sports venue manager.

One participant describes the lack of response to the disclosures he made over several years:

“ I was telling people for years and they was always – took no notice, you know. But I don't think anyone did in them days. No one sort of talked about it, no one spoke about it, you know. And that's – for the institutions to recognise it could be a problem, it was – because for boys to be running around and going, “You're sleeping next to [another adult perpetrator in the club]”, they knew, so why didn't anyone else know? And you only have to be within hearing distance to hear it all going on. There was plenty of leaders and workers there.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant relayed how he tried to tell his father what had happened to him the day after a particular episode of sexual abuse but he was prevented from doing so by his stepmother:

“ And it was the day after because I was in shock over what happened. And I went to tell my dad and my dad's second wife came out and said to me, “Your dad can't speak to you, he's not well enough. He doesn't want to speak to you.”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

In another case a participant made a disclosure to the sports institution concerned, who reacted proactively and positively by removing the perpetrator from his post and referring the case to the police and the sport's national governing body. However, some of the institution's subsequent actions, although potentially well-meaning, created some further difficulties for the participant:

“ *But I heard that I think a few weeks after that or possibly not, even, they had told all of their staff including their casual workers about what had happened and who it was. They decided to tell all of their male coaches that they weren't allowed to coach me anymore. So that was rather frustrating.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The institution also employed someone, somewhat unnecessarily in the participant's view, to supervise their subsequent coaching sessions for a while. As a result of the case, the sport's national governing body revised its child safeguarding policy.

Other participants tried to disclose in more indirect ways. One participant explained how she wrote about the sexual abuse and shared the letters with her teacher as a way to try to disclose what was happening, and how badly this was responded to:

“ *... I brought these letters on my camping trip ... I'm handing them to my year six teacher, who handed them to my headmaster. And he pulled me aside away from the group activities. He might've asked me whether they were true, and I probably said, "No." He blasted me. He - I remember being sat on the hill and facing a lake and he told me that, "I was a stupid little girl and I was never to say anything again". He didn't tell my mum, nothing.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The participant did not know at the time but later found out that the headmaster did refer the matter to the local authority but that this resulted in a cover up. The female teacher who was the initial recipient of the participant's letters was called to a meeting where she was intimidated, belittled and told she was lying:

“ *[The teacher attended a meeting at local authority] ... where she was met across the room by five males, one of them being [Perpetrator] himself, and told that she was making things up. And she said that she felt belittled ... And they all told her that she was making things up.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

A few participants who were directly asked or prompted to disclose by adults were still unable to tell, or initially denied anything was happening, later opening up about the abuse:

“ *So my mum asked me, "Is there anything going on?". I remember her asking me that evening, and I said no, because I was completely - I was frightened, ashamed. Went to bed then got up the next morning, then just sort of told her.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

One participant explained how after witnessing how badly another victim was treated after their disclosure, she and her sister could not tell anyone that they were also being abused by the same perpetrator:

“ I remember being in primary school, and this other girl [sister’s classmate] crying and she was in my sister’s year and she was saying, “They know about [Perpetrator]”. And her and [sister] were discussing whether to tell anyone and [sister] said “I’m not going to say anything”. And I remember my headmaster again then, [headmaster] having a go at [sister’s classmate]. She was quite well developed for her age, and he just talked to her like rubbish during this time ...

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some participants were supported by their parents and families after making disclosures as a child but others were not. Regardless of whether they received any support, participants experienced a range of impacts following their disclosures, including being subject to victim blaming, rumour and speculation and feeling emotional distress, anger and rage.

Participants recounted how other adults and professionals did not believe the disclosures they had made or blamed them for what had happened. In one case other sports coaches, teachers and a school counsellor only finally believed the participant’s allegations after the perpetrator pleaded guilty in court, with one senior teacher appearing to blame the participant:

“ Apart from that one of the casual workers at the [sports venue] also worked at my school and came into my school, said that this has happened, actually to just a group of teachers. And then that got fed back to my pastoral care worker, to the pastoral head at my school, who then said, “Well what on earth are you doing?”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

After disclosing the abuse he experienced, another participant was told he was “evil” and blamed for the abuse (and the perpetrator’s subsequent suicide) by a member of the perpetrator’s family who asked him “*what have you done?*” [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context].

Negative and unhelpful responses to their disclosures caused particular upset and anger for some participants, which one participant explained led to a significant deterioration in his behaviour:

“ I was a proper little bastard for what happened to me, I was really bad and all that. And I probably pissed off some of the teachers rather than them trying to help me.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The impacts of others finding out about the sexual abuse are described by one participant who was made to feel uncomfortable due to speculation and rumour circulating in the sports community. She also faced some issues with regard to her ongoing coaching:

“ Once it all came out, I was told by the police that I shouldn't talk about it to anyone. So there were a lot of rumours flying around because he just suddenly left and went and joined his family in [location]. And it was rather uncomfortable at that time because there was a lot of speculation.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ So there were a lot of things around that time that didn't necessarily make things easier. When it was then reported in the local newspaper, by the time that it actually was going through the court system, I think basically, everyone knew at the [sports venue], through one way or another. And then the fact that then I couldn't talk about it at all because it was still ongoing made things quite difficult when I was trying to get coaching or anything like that.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants described numerous barriers preventing them from disclosing, or feeling able to disclose, their experience of sexual abuse when they were children. Feeling a need to protect their own families was a major barrier discussed by participants. As well as trying to prevent any emotional pain and consequences for their families, participants were also trying to protect against the perpetrator's threats of violence, or the risk of what their own parents and others might do to the perpetrator as a result of the disclosure. Participants described being fearful of the impact the disclosures would have on their parents and families, *“But I was just too frightened to tell them”* [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context], or wanting to protect others from experiencing the pain and distress they were feeling:

“ ... you protect everyone else from feeling that pain. It's a pain that you never want anyone else to feel. And that's where protecting everyone else came in. I didn't want anyone else to feel that pain. And in a bit it got to the point where I couldn't hold it anymore, you know.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The connection between the participant's and perpetrator's family was also an inhibitor to disclosure for that participant:

“ ... obviously because he was me mum's friend I couldn't say anything. I felt that if I said anything to my parents they'd literally kill him. We are from the [Area 1] and anyone that found out that he was doing this to kids would come out and kill him because you know, their kids were all at the Club and it was like a local club in the [Area 1] ... I went to live with my nan. And, I just felt like I couldn't destroy what we've got as a family. So I put everyone else's feelings before me own.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

A further barrier for this participant was not having someone else within the sports context to tell as the perpetrator was the highest authority in the sports club:

“ ... I don't know where I would have turned to report it to anyone because he was top of the ladder, as far as the club goes, you know.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some participants did not disclose as children as they did not understand the perpetrator's behaviour was wrong or abnormal (as a result of their age and level of understanding; having been subject to grooming or as a result of previous experience of sexual abuse at home) as this participant explains:

“ ... if they did ask what was wrong because my head was like an exploded volcano I couldn't have told you it was wrong because I didn't know it was wrong.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Connected to this was the fact that as children some participants felt guilty and ashamed and did not understand that they were not to blame for what had happened:

“ If they had of said to me, listen, it's not your fault whatever happened, blah, blah, blah, I might've said something then. But it just didn't happen like that. It was just – I was in fear.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

As referred to above, the failure of adults to respond appropriately to the behavioural signs they were exhibiting was a further barrier to children disclosing the abuse at the time:

“ They just thought I was naughty. No one asked. I didn't know I had to tell anybody.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

7.2 Experiences of disclosure and impacts after the abuse had ended/ as an adult

In describing their experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse in sports contexts as adults, participants spoke about the challenges they faced in doing so, both emotional and practical, and described some of the impacts that resulted. Three participants had disclosed the abuse when they were adults, some made disclosures to more than one person or institution. Two participants reported the abuse to the local authority or local institution responsible for the sports venue at the time the abuse took place, one participant disclosed to their mother and one reported to the police.

Some participants had disclosed what had happened to them earlier in their lives, in young adulthood, whereas others waited many years, including one participant who had only disclosed to his spouse after deciding to take part in the Truth Project. He explained how his wife of many years “*was disappointed I hadn't told her*” [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context] but how he was still unable to talk with her at length about his experiences and how the recent disclosure had triggered emotions he had kept “*buried*” since the abuse happened.

For some, the disclosure came after they were unable to cope with trying to manage the impact the abuse had had upon them and they needed help and support:

“ *I couldn't hold it on my own. It was destroying me. And that's what I had to tell me mum. And once I told her it was like – Oh God, you know now, you know. I ain't got to destroy this – I ain't got to – you know. You know and you can care, and you can love me and understand me. And that's it.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

This participant also explained how after disclosing in young adulthood his mother felt guilty and blamed herself:

“ *... I told me mum years later. I was about 22 or 23. I was just saying to – in the other room that I wasn't sure whether that – well, I'm not sure whether it was a good decision or a bad decision. Because me mum basically blamed herself. She said you know, "What are you saying, it was my fault?" And I said, "No, I'm not saying that."*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Having finally been able to disclose the child sexual abuse they had suffered in a sports context, the same participant described how difficult and challenging it was to then have to tell so many different people about it after years of keeping it a secret:

“ *It's a case of – at every step you have to go – of starting your recovery, you're forever seeing different people, you know. You go and see one clinical psychologist; they send you on to another. Then you've never told anyone for nearly 40 years and all of a sudden you have to go and see all of these strangers ... But like I say, in the system of being understood and being heard and reporting, it's like you're telling thousands of people all of a sudden and you've not been able to tell anyone your whole life. And it's a hard thing to do.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants also spoke of the secondary victimisation or stigma they experienced as a result of the responses by institutions, sports communities and police after making their disclosure as an adult. For example, one participant explained how after disclosing the abuse they experienced in a sports context the responsible local authority denied the extent of the allegations and were unhelpful and unforthcoming during the civil legal process. The local authority also tried to offer a damages settlement before the participant's final psychiatric report was obtained, which felt like a further abuse:

“ *To me that feels like an abusive pattern of, "Shut-up and silence again, and we're not even going to take into consideration, or even look into how this has affected you, or we won't even bother to wait for your psychiatric independent report, we're just going to do that".*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant described how she gained long-term, unwanted notoriety within her sports community in the years after people became aware of the abuse perpetrated by her coach:

“ *Well, it's a very small world. I think you get that probably with a lot of sporting communities. It is, it's a very small world and rumours travel*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Seeing the recognition the perpetrator had received or still continued to receive within the sporting community after the abuse was difficult and uncomfortable for some participants. For example, one participant was filled with disbelief when he saw a statement on the sports club website still thanking the perpetrator as the founder of the club. This led the participant to believe that no other victims and survivors have come forward yet to disclose the abuse by that perpetrator. Another participant described the anger and distress he felt when he finally found out, via the internet, the name of the man who had abused him in a sports context as a child:

“ *I felt anger and hate as soon as I saw that name. He was the one that abused me ... Cold shivers went up my back when I saw and recognised the name.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Describing barriers to disclosing as adults, participants also discussed wanting to protect their families from experiencing pain and upset. For example, one explained how he really wanted to tell his mother about the sexual abuse he experienced as a child, but he was too concerned about how she would cope with the news and he did not want to upset her.

The relative silence in society about sexual abuse in sports, until recently, had prevented another participant from disclosing what had happened to him for many years; he felt it was a rare occurrence. Another participant described how the difficulty in getting legal representation to seek justice was a barrier to disclosing and taking action about what had happened.

7.3 Experiences of the criminal justice system

7.3.1 Experiences of the criminal justice system as a child

Six participants had reported the abuse to the police, either as children at the time or in later life as an adult. The three participants who reported as children had mixed experiences of the criminal justice system but found the process, particularly events in court, very difficult.

One participant described how the police were fair and open with him when he initially reported the abuse but the subsequent lack of rapport and trust, along with the questioning style of the police during the investigation, meant that he was unable to disclose the full details of what had happened to him:

“ *... a couple of police officers came round, and made it clear I didn't have to pursue it if I didn't want to, it was only my evidence, but obviously they would encourage it. And I was keen to – at the time I remember I was keen to pursue it because: one, I was a child, you know, it's wrong; and I didn't want it to happen to anybody else.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ Interestingly, when it all came to a head and we went to the police ... because during the police investigation, I didn't tell them the full details of what happened, because I felt that I couldn't. The questioning made me – yeah, sort of – I completely shut down. And then they got probably half of it – they certainly didn't get the full picture of what was going on.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant explained how although his sibling was approached to be a witness after the perpetrator's abuse of another victim was reported, the police did not appear to undertake wider investigations looking into who else could have been victims. This meant that although the perpetrator was charged with offences against the other child and the participant's brother, he was not charged with offences against the participant himself. The perpetrator pleaded guilty to the charges that were put to him, but the participant was shocked at the minimal punishment he received:

“ It is shocking that [perpetrator] was just fined £50 at a Magistrates Court – I have no idea if this was typical of the sentencing in [year in 1970s]. It seems his life went on as before ... [Perpetrator] caused untold harm and should have been stopped when he was arrested.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The lack of communication from police after her initial disclosure and during the investigation and court process, caused confusion for another participant:

“ Then I was told they were [investigating] and then all of the information that they were sending was just going through my mum. And then I was being treated as a witness but also as a victim. It was rather confused, sort of snippets of information that I was getting.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The same participant explained how it felt that during the case the police were focused entirely on getting a prosecution and getting her to agree to give evidence rather than also offering any support or help:

“ I feel like the police were there to prosecute him. They weren't there to – they weren't even there to provide me with links to counselling or – that's the thing, there was no place to go – it didn't feel like there was a place that I could go to and I could get support on what was happening with the police and I could get support for what was happening in my school. Or advice on what I should be doing if I was no longer anonymous. And I was having to deal with all of this.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ It felt at the time like a lot was made of like, if I was prepared to go to court, before his plea hearing. In the end he pleaded guilty to five out of the six counts that were brought against him and the sixth one was disregarded. The plea deal was – the plea was accepted.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The court process was very difficult for those participants who were party to it as children. It was described by one participant (who was under the age of 13 when he gave live evidence in court), as “traumatic”. He describes how the defence tried to discredit his allegations:

“ I remember in the court the line of questioning that the defence took was that he was just somebody who felt sorry for me, and actually cared for me and was trying to do a good thing, and when he was showering me, and drying me afterwards with a towel in an inappropriate manner, et cetera, that was normal, it was – and actually he was caring in that – I was asked did I ever say that I loved him.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The participant also describes how devastating it was when the perpetrator was found not guilty, leaving him feeling entirely disbelieved:

“ ... the experience of the court and the trauma around that, I wouldn't say it was as traumatic as the abuse itself, but it was certainly quite traumatic, looking back. Following on from that, obviously the not guilty verdict was a huge blow. I remember just crying, you feel like it was completely wasted pain, you know, it was a waste of, yeah, waste of time, a lot of needless pain, et cetera.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant felt her views and wishes were not fully considered, respected or taken into account by the police or prosecution during the case:

“ So, they thought that even without my statement in that month gap, whilst I was still dealing with everything, that they would still proceed with it. But to be outright told that, “We will proceed with this whether you like it or not” ... But obviously looking back I understand. It's – the court process is not for me. As in, it's not – it's not designed to make me feel better.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ The other thing was when I was at the pre-sentencing meeting, they sort of referred to my statement but in the wrong order. So they actually got things slightly wrong ... I was rather put out. And then he [prosecution barrister] came to meet me afterwards but you could tell that he just wanted to leave. He was sort of saying, “Is everything okay?”, and “But apart from that, is everything okay?”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

She also felt like the impact of the abuse she experienced was not being fully acknowledged or taken into account:

“ The other thing that I felt when I was writing the impact statement was, it felt like a bit of a box ticking exercise. Because they said, “Yes, we'll take your views into account in the sentencing.” But what can they be expecting? What do they want me to say? That yes, it was absolutely terrible but yes, I was going through exams and I did this and all of this, but obviously, you can't ask them to explain their decision or to justify it. But it did feel like they were just sort of paying their dues to it and then moving on.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

7.3.2 Experiences of the criminal justice system as an adult

The three participants who engaged with the police and criminal justice agencies as adults described disappointing responses. They recounted their struggle to find justice when the perpetrator was deceased. In one case the participant reported the abuse to two police forces but no further action was taken as the perpetrator had died. The participant gave a statement to the first force, however the second one said that as he had already given a statement there would be no point in putting him through a potentially distressing video interview given that, as a result of the perpetrator's death, there was nothing they could do anyway.

In another case, although the perpetrator was charged with sexual offences he died before the trial could take place, and the participant struggled to find legal support to pursue a civil claim:

“ I feel with these historic abuse cases, and a lot of the cover ups there, the amount of firms that I approached that just shut me down; 1) because he had died and 2), it's more about it being out of time. It literally felt like there was no way of even having the chance of justice.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

A further participant felt that the police force he reported to “*could not care less*” [Truth Project participant abused in a sports context] about what had happened to him due to the length of time that had passed since the abuse occurred and because the participant was no longer living in the relevant jurisdiction.

In addition to the experiences of dealing with the police, participants also described the challenges of the criminal injuries compensation process, one describing it as “*horrendous*” and “*a nightmare*”:

“ With the CICA [Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority], I went to see this woman yesterday, the clinical psychologist. Now, there's two reports from clinical psychologists at the [voluntary support organisation the participant attends] and no one had contacted any of them, to see what the situation is. I felt like I was being interrogated yesterday, it was horrendous. And it wasn't until the point that I broke down, and I was literally having a breakdown and she was handing me more tissues. It wasn't until she'd got me to that point that she then went, “Okay”, and opened the door. And you know, I had to show her that before any of it mattered.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant also had a particularly negative experience after having their compensation claim rejected due to the specific offence the perpetrator was charged with at the time:

“ I was told I should apply for compensation, which was rejected on the grounds that they thought I could have – I think I have it with me [the letter] – on the grounds that he was charged with sexual activity with a child and that it was not able to disprove ostensible consent. “Compensation is not payable to a victim who consented in fact, even if they could have not consented in law. I cannot be satisfied that the evidence shows that consent was not given. I also note that the offender was charged and convicted of sexual activity with a female under 16 and not a sexual assault.”

[quoting from a letter received from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority]

“ Which was not made clear to me at the time, that was a distinction that actually had any bearing in how other governmental authorities were going to consider my case.

[Truth Project participant abused in a sports context]

The participant goes on to describe how unhelpful the tone of letter from the CICA advising her of the decision was, and how she was left with the feeling that despite the fact that the perpetrator was convicted and went to prison, she would always be expected to prove what happened to her:

“ I didn't appreciate either the tone of the way that this was written or the fact that there was somehow this distinction in what he was being charged with, that didn't actually – when I gave my statement, the bits that they asked me to focus on were not the bits that would have maybe proved it as sexual assault versus sexual activity with a child. Because they just wanted to nail him for something and they thought this would be easier to prove.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ It wasn't so much about the money; I've got to say. It was more just a bit of a kick in the teeth. To be honest I was just going to use it to go back to the private counsellor ... It sort of felt like I had to – it was part of this whole, bigger fight for legitimacy or ... It was more a realisation that actually, no, this isn't over. This is never going to be over. This is never going to be clear and cut and dried just because he got convicted or went to prison. People are going to have – and it's not just in here – people are going to have those opinions, people are going to say, “Prove it”. People are going to say, “Why didn't you do x?”, or, “Wasn't your skirt too short?”, or like that.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Chapter 8

Impacts of the child sexual abuse

This chapter sets out the range of impacts that the experience of child sexual abuse has had on participants at different stages of their lives. This chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- What are the impacts of child sexual abuse in sports contexts reported by victims and survivors?

8.1 Impacts of child sexual abuse in sports contexts

8.1.1 Direct impacts, consequences and health

The impacts of experiencing child sexual abuse in sports contexts described by participants are extensive and diverse, however none of the participants specifically talked about the impact of the abuse in terms of their involvement in sport thereafter.

In describing the far-reaching impact of experiencing child sexual abuse in a sports context as a child, one participant relays how the abuse left him feeling he lost his happy childhood – the childhood he had experienced before the abuse:

“The other impact as well is I feel like I totally lost my childhood. Now I can't remember it. I can't remember anything about it, pre-abuse. I almost feel like a childhood was completely lost, taken away. I cannot look at images of myself as a kid because it just upsets me so much. Because I see me, young, happy, just can't – just cannot deal with it. My wife put a photo up around ... a kid with a hammer playing at my nan's house. I literally, I just could not cope with it ... So that was really tough.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

As children, participants experienced emotional and psychological distress, which included feelings of confusion, anger, guilt, fear and powerlessness. Several participants recalled an immediate awareness of feeling different following the first incident of abuse, as illustrated by one participant who was aware of the devastating impact this would have on his life:

“So, that first time was – I remember thinking to myself, “Please don't, please don't do this because you're going to – you know, it's going to ruin the rest of my life, you know.” And it's that – you can't describe it – the amount of pain you have from that first instant ... You're never going to feel pain like that again.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants recounted periods of overt emotional distress which included physical signs such as shaking and crying and being 'rough' towards others at school.

“But at that time I was really worried, very emotional, constantly crying in class, and yeah, just not settled at all.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Behaviourally, participants described difficulties at school, a deterioration in their behaviour involving 'acting out' which led to expulsion from school for one participant. This also manifested as self-harming behaviour or criminality, for example, one participant set fire to a building at a young age. One participant's behavioural issues contributed to them being placed into care by social services out of the local area, which exacerbated their mother's depression.

“ *I think that was always my fight though, I think the care system had always made me out to be this awful child, but really, you know, I was just acting out from what had happened to me ...*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants described the emotional and behavioural impacts extending into adolescence and young adulthood in the form of risk-taking behaviours and mental health challenges, such as drug and alcohol misuse, criminal behaviour, suicide attempts and self-harm, depression and anorexia.

In sharing their experiences, participants described extensive and long-term impacts of the abuse they experienced as a child in a sports context. Several participants described the acute lifelong vulnerability they experience on a daily basis, for example:

“ *Ah, it's, it's horrendous. See you carry it with you forever. And it's - like when I switched on and realised that it's the vulnerability of everything, you know. For the rest of your life you'll feel vulnerable. I was talking yesterday about being in a room with a - another male. You still have that fear every time you're in a room with another male. And you know it's irrational but it's, you know. You're - as soon as you're in that position you're back to being that child again in that situation.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

In the following quote the same participant describes how he has carried anger throughout his life but was not even aware of it until others pointed it out to him:

“ *You don't realise how much it affects your life. You know, you don't realise how angry you are until you hear it from other people, you know ... And you just think, "I'm not angry. I'm not angry." I am angry. So, yeah. It has a devastating effect on your life really.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some participants continued to experience flashbacks, panic attacks, anxiety and low self-esteem in relation to the impact of child sexual abuse in adulthood, whereas others described disconnecting entirely from their childhood experience and abusive memories.

“ *So I have flashbacks, nightmares, can't sleep, don't suffer from panic attacks any more. I did have a couple with certain triggers when I was younger. I would draw a lot, sometimes get to a state of not wanting to be around anyone. High levels of anxiety at times as well.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ *I just buried it deep, deep, deep down.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

No participants in this small sample talked about any particular physical impacts they had experienced as a result of the child sexual abuse in sports contexts.¹⁰

8.1.2 Relationships and sexual behaviour

Participants spoke about how the abuse experienced in a sports context had impacted on their relationships with their own families as a child and extended into adulthood and their relationships with their own children.

Several participants described having no voice as a child or being entirely powerless, and the wider impacts of holding what happened to them inside.

“ *I was powerless everywhere.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ *My family became a place of secrets and toxic hidden rage. I was never given the opportunity until now to speak ... I would like these crimes against me to be recorded, as I had no voice as a child. As [perpetrator] is dead, this action will be my justice and bring me some peace.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants highlighted difficulties with trust and intimacy, and the struggle to form and maintain relationships from adolescence throughout their adult lives.

“ *And then we left school ... and I guess then girls start becoming a bigger part of your life around that age, and then that all started to get quite difficult, I suppose, again, having to trust someone, be intimate with someone. Yes, I remember it being very difficult. And around ... 17, 18, I did meet a girl, ... we were together for about five years. I confided a lot in her, she became a good support, we were very close. But when that relationship fell apart, when she left me, that was then exposed, I felt so much - I went off the rails quite badly.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Several participants spoke about their difficulty with sexual intimacy, which could also act as a trigger from their childhood abuse, invoking feelings of shame and anger:

“ *As far as relationships go, I can't have a sexual relationship. Because I find it disgusting ... as soon as I'm in that situation I'm back there. So I can't - as far as - it's a dirty thing, it's a you know. So I've never been able to have that in my life. I've never, you know, whereas other people enjoy it.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

¹⁰ Although no participants in this sample reported physical impacts of the abuse they experienced we know such impacts have been evident in our other Truth Project Thematic Report studies. The Inquiry's *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment* (Fisher et al., 2017) also found that experiencing child sexual abuse has been associated with a wide range of adverse physical health outcomes for victims and survivors.

Several participants who had experienced marital and relationship breakdown described exposure to further vulnerabilities as a result of their relationship ending. One participant describes acknowledging his inability to love following his marriage breakdown:

“ *I have never 'felt' love even though I got married.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The emotional difficulties experienced within relationships could also extend to participants' relationships with their own children. One participant spoke about being largely absent when his children were growing up, and several other participants described feelings of worry and self doubt about their ability to parent.

“ *And then it comes back to myself and my wife, we spoke about having kids ourselves ... but I look at it in terms of my day to day functioning, depression and anxiety, would that be fair to put that onto a kid, and that background, and also I think having children of my own, my anxiety - I'd worry so much about them, I think my anxiety would just go through the roof, and I don't - it's had an impact in terms of that, whether I feel I could have a family of my own, because I don't know how I would cope with worrying about them. So that's been difficult.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

One participant recalled the trauma of pregnancy, triggering memories and flashbacks to her abuse and the ensuing struggle to bond with her child after giving birth.

8.1.3 Education, employment and housing

Participant accounts indicate overt and notable changes in their behaviour, as a direct result of the abuse they experienced within sports contexts. Many participants described a deterioration in their behaviour at school, so much so that for one participant she was expelled from school as a result of her violent and disruptive behaviour towards others.

Several participants talked about the experience of abuse having impacted on their ability to achieve their potential, with one participant referring to the disruption to their sporting activity and the victim-blaming attitudes of others.

“ *I caused mayhem at that school. And if I'd of got my head down and studied I'd of been a different person today, I think. I would have been more clever.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ *That's the thing, because people don't see it as, oh yes, she went through sexual assault. The thing that went around was, oh, she slept with a married guy. So yeah. And it was something that I just had to fight over and over again.*
Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

For most participants, the widespread consequences of child sexual abuse coupled with other adverse childhood experiences (described in Chapter 4), extended into adulthood. Some talked about the impact on their further education and employment throughout their lives in terms of difficulties at university or in the workplace. One participant spoke of a turning point at university after nearly suffering a breakdown in response he thought to his parents' acrimonious divorce, which was occurring at the same time as he was sexually abused. At the time he had seen the impact of the divorce as separate to that of the sexual abuse he experienced. Another participant described their professional role being linked to the sports context where the abuse took place and the ongoing struggle that can present:

“ No, and at times ... because I'm dealing with people in the [department], and that's become a little bit – well, more than a little bit difficult. Very, very tough sometimes because I almost feel like – at times I feel like I'm punishing myself. I have thought about doing something else, just something different from it, but it's what I love ... but there are, I suppose, yeah – there are problems and reminders sometimes around it of what happened, so that makes it – that can make work a little bit difficult at times, and sometimes it gets on top of me but, on the whole, I'm quite pleased it hasn't put me off, I think. Yes. But it is quite tough.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

The same participant also reflected on the positive impact of higher education which provided a means to focus and 'take his mind off' the trauma of his childhood sexual abuse.

8.1.4 Criminal behaviour

As a result of their experiences as children and the emotional and mental health problems they suffered, some participants continued to engage in 'risky behaviour' throughout their lives including: drug and alcohol misuse; criminal behaviour, and violent and aggressive behaviour towards others.

“ I set light to that farm when I was nine. And then I just went really rebellious because of what happened to me.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ Because I'd gone off the rails you know. I was really angry. Obviously I had to deal with it on my own. And I got to the point where ... I was in a right bad way. I used to smoke cannabis and all that sort of thing and get in trouble. And got expelled from school, and I was just causing distress to everyone.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ I was drinking from around 16, and alcohol's always been something that – and even now, it's something that – it just takes – you know, you don't think of – it just numbs the pain totally. And it's something that I still do now, when things get a bit much, so that's always been a crutch ever since. No other drug use, but just a lot of boozing.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

For one participant this behaviour culminated in over 250 minor offence convictions leading up to a more serious violent conviction. During his period of incarceration, with the help of his probation officer, the participant felt able to face his past, and his fears, and tackle his offending behaviour.

8.2 Re-victimisation

In addition to some participants having experienced sexual abuse prior to their involvement in sport, a number described being subject to further victimisation following their experiences of child sexual abuse in this context. Some participants described feeling re-victimised by the ongoing challenge of disclosing the abuse to new people, particularly to professionals and health practitioners who should be aware of a victim and survivor's history. For the participants who had experienced the civil and criminal justice process, they spoke of feeling re-victimised by poor professional responses in connection to their experiences of child sexual abuse. One participant described her further victimisation through witnessing the ongoing sexual and physical abuse of another child in a residential psychiatric unit, where the participant had been admitted as a result of the impact of her abuse in a sports context.

8.3 Life journey narratives

This chapter has detailed the range of impacts child sexual abuse perpetrated in sports contexts has had on participants' lives. However, as described in [The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment](#), some individuals may also demonstrate resilience and recovery after exposure to a potentially traumatic event (Fisher et al., 2017). In their accounts, Truth Project participants demonstrated varying levels of resilience and recovery (recovery experiences are described in more detail in Chapter 9). Some articulated that while the sexual abuse had adverse consequences for their lives, they had also been able to achieve some degree of success and happiness in adulthood, while others said that the experience had ruined their lives.

The impacts and ongoing consequences of child sexual abuse were relayed in the life journey narratives shared by participants. 'Life journeys' are a description of the person's experience of abuse in particular contexts or institutions as a child, and the subsequent impacts and consequences they attribute to their childhood experience of sexual abuse throughout their lives.

The Australian Royal Commission used a range of categories to identify commonalities and differences across the experiences and life journeys of victims and survivors sharing their accounts (see Katz et al., 2017). The categories, set out below, were based on the five different life journey narratives identified in participants' accounts:

- *a life dominated by the sexual abuse experience* where victims and survivors' life journeys were characterised by persistent and pervasive difficulties throughout their childhood and adult life;
- *a life where victims and survivors had experienced substantial adverse impacts but tended to be optimistic that their situation would improve;*
- *a mixed life journey* where victims and survivors functioned well in some aspects of their lives while simultaneously experiencing significant difficulty in other areas;

- a life journey that vacillated between periods of wellbeing and periods of difficulty and/or distress; and
- a life journey with predominantly more positive life outcomes where victims and survivors acknowledged the sexual abuse and its effects but had found ways to live with the trauma of child sexual abuse.

As these categories were developed for a similar project to the Inquiry's Truth Project, we were able to incorporate the five categories into our qualitative analysis.¹¹

One participant in this study described their life as being dominated by their experience of sexual abuse. Three participants spoke of mixed experiences in their life journey where they moved between periods of wellbeing and periods of difficulty and/or distress.

“ In terms of even now, I feel like it's a case of getting by, a lot of the time I'm just trying to keep everything going, as opposed to really living life. But I do feel it's a bit – it's tough. Just functioning, properly, all the time, is tough. Some days I do function fine, and others it's really difficult. Quite a lot of the time it's difficult.

[Truth Project participant abuse in sports context]

Two participants described the adverse effect the experiences of abuse had had upon their lives but also spoke with some optimism, as the following quote illustrates:

“ I'm not lying. It did happen to me, you know, it's like ... it's in the past, you can't change the past. But I can change the future. I can....

[Truth Project participant abuse in sports context]

One participant described a life journey with predominantly more positive outcomes where they acknowledged the abuse and its effects but had found ways to live with the trauma of child sexual abuse.

The accounts of the remaining two participants contained insufficient detail for us to identify which, if any, of the life journey categories would be appropriate to describe their overall experience.

¹¹ We did so by including them in our thematic framework. See the *Truth Project Research: Methods* report (King and Brähler, 2019) for the full framework. As the life journey of each victim and survivor is unique, some cases did not clearly mirror any of the five categories or there was not enough information in the individual account to assign the narrative to a category. We have been clear where this is the case.

Chapter 9

Experiences of recovery and support

This chapter highlights the coping strategies participants adopted to manage their experiences of child sexual abuse and its impacts, and the factors that have helped or hindered their recovery. It also describes their experiences of informal and formal support. This chapter addresses the research sub-question:

- What has helped or hindered victims and survivors' recovery from child sexual abuse that occurred in sports contexts?

9.1 Experiences of recovery

9.1.1 Coping strategies and aids to recovery

Participants' accounts highlighted a number of strategies which helped them to cope with the experience and impacts of child sexual abuse. These ranged from physical and behavioural actions, such as physical avoidance of places and hurting oneself on sports apparatus, to emotional avoidance and using a range of techniques, such as employing humour or abusing alcohol, to try to cope. As one participant described:

“ I am a bit of a joker. So people warm to that if you know what I mean. I've always used ... I used it to hide me hang ups, and I was never a sort of a fighter, I was more of the joker in the pack. So, and that was my way of surviving.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant explained how drinking a lot of alcohol is their method of trying to cope and numb the pain:

“ Because once – you just lose control, because I like the feeling of it, the numbness, the pain that it takes away, really.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Some participants described avoidance and dissociation strategies to 'shut themselves off', burying the abuse deep within themselves, limiting their ability to remember and disconnecting from their abusive memories. However, some of the more negative coping mechanisms were not successful in the long term, and participants eventually began to recognise the impacts of their abuse and confront their thoughts and feelings with the help of others.

“ You then cut yourself off and you just think, “Well I'm not going to ever let anyone see me upset ever again”, and you just shut it all off.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants explained some of the things that had helped them in their path to recovery. Connecting with other victims and survivors and disclosing their experiences after years of not telling anyone was felt to be a positive strategy. For many the opportunity to help others and give something back was incredibly powerful in their journey to recovery.

Learning new skills or furthering their education has aided a number of participants, as has other creative outlets such as listening to or playing music and focusing on positive self-care, including mindfulness and martial arts.

“ *But I think that the education wasn't an achievement, it was me sort of trying to take my mind off – it was something I could throw myself into, make me feel better about myself, give me a bit more self-worth – I thought that it did give me a little bit more – value myself a little bit more, my self-worth, I suppose. Yes, so I think had I not been abused, I don't honestly know whether I would have gone on to academically achieve what I did, in a weird kind of way.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ *And that's how I coped. I sat in me bedroom for – I don't know – for two years, listening to music. And I found solace in the lyrics of records ... I don't listen to music, I listen to the lyrics. And I gave myself self-therapy. Well I had to learn to, how to deal with it all. But I don't think you can ever deal with it all, but you just learn how to cope.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

9.1.2 Hindrances to recovery

Participants relayed numerous experiences which hindered their recovery. For some, the lack of professional support and acknowledgement from institutions and professionals, both as a child and an adult, further negatively impacted on their experience of sexual abuse.

Participants felt unable to disclose what was happening at that time, and that opportunities to identify signs of abuse were missed by various professionals outside of the sports context. For those who did disclose at the time, and later in life, the subsequent lack of support and poor response from various professionals and institutions continued to hinder their recovery.

“ *So it is just having been let down, I suppose by the [sports club], the [department connected with the sport], because had he – well, I guess nobody should be given those sorts of powers with that sort of background. Then the police, the court system, and then no help afterwards.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Participants described how certain situations or direct reminders could trigger them and hinder recovery. One participant explained the hurt and shock at seeing a recently published testimonial on a website related to the particular sport, paying tribute to his perpetrator:

“ *I don't want him to be seen as the great and the good.*

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Another participant described feeling overwhelming guilt as a child, carrying through into his adult life after being blamed for the death of the perpetrator, who took his own life shortly after the abuse was discovered.

9.2 Experiences of support

9.2.1 Support from sports organisations and wider professional networks

A range of experiences of support were shared by participants, both formal¹² and informal. Participants relayed feeling a lack of support from the relevant sports context, institutions associated with where the abuse took place and from the police and education services. Participants felt let down by sports organisations and wider agencies as a result of unhelpful responses, and in some cases no response at all, and a lack of support available.

“ So they had a school counsellor and they managed to get me one appointment. The first time I went in they asked me, they sort of said, “But in [sport] you wear such short dresses anyway. Are you sure you didn’t do anything?”, and I thought, “Well, I’m not going back.”

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Two participants spoke specifically of the lack of support they received during police investigations and after court cases:

“ The after support following on from the court case was just non-existent. I was really traumatised, and I really needed help. You know, I was in a lot of pain. And I had – I remember – so there was nothing through the school, I had one visit from a social worker. The social worker asked me, am I okay? Obviously, I’m going to say yes. I’m absolutely fine. If you ever want to talk about it, basically, here’s my number. And that was one visit and done. And I was given a number. Nothing. No support. Really, I needed help then.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ The impression that I got from the police was that it was very disjointed. When we asked if there were any counselling services available, they weren’t able to tell us of any. They weren’t able to tell us of any available routes.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

There were some positive examples in participant accounts of support offered by a range of professionals in their adult lives from institutions and agencies not linked to where the abuse took place (as described in section 9.2.3 below). These professionals included those working in both statutory and third sector support services as well as in healthcare.

¹² ‘Formal support’ here refers to services, organisations or interventions that provide support, advice or treatment to victims, survivors and their families to reduce the impact of having experienced child sexual abuse. These services encompass a range of different types, sectors and providers and can be statutory, voluntary or private. Services may also be specialist or generalist in relation to child sexual abuse. Services are provided across different sectors such as criminal justice interventions, health service treatments, specialist counselling and mental health support.

9.2.2 Informal support

Some participants described having good support from family and friends, following disclosure of child sexual abuse. One participant's relationship with his mother was strengthened after he told her about the abuse he experienced and the support and care she gave him was particularly important:

“ Because she was like me best mate you know, even though she couldn't help me from what had happened. It was like she was going to be there for me for the rest of my life. And when she passed – me dad – we went to see her in the chapel of rest, and my dad says, “You was the one she always cared about, or worried about.” But I didn't want to be known for that, you know. I just wanted to be one of her kids.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

However, as he further explained his wider family support can still have its challenges:

“ So although they are supportive – yeah, they're all so, so different in terms of what they're doing now, their lives, but as a unit, we're kind of okay. Which is good. But although they're strong and supportive, I can't talk to them about what I've talked to you about today, because of the pain that it puts on them.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Several participants spoke about the importance of particular supportive friendships in their adult life, rather than the support of family members, which have helped them greatly. Supportive friends and colleagues included those who work professionally as therapists, as well as other victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

9.2.3 Formal support

As discussed earlier, participants had different experiences of receiving formal support, and views were mixed on the helpfulness of such support. Formal support can be offered by both statutory and third sector agencies (including charities) and can either be more general support or more specialist in nature, for example dealing with sexual violence and abuse. However, only one participant mentioned accessing a specialist sexual abuse support service, finding the counselling to be particularly helpful:

“ I've been seeing [Counsellor] for about three years now. And it's a brilliant, brilliant charity. I mean, [Counsellor] is wonderful. She – I just sit and talk – you ain't even got to talk about the abuse, you just talk about where it was going on the day, and if the abuse comes up.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Very few participants mentioned having accessed or been offered formal counselling as children. One participant, who had received formal support as a child, had mixed experiences. The first instance involved a school counsellor displaying victim-blaming attitudes, resulting in a particularly negative experience (as noted in section 9.2.1). The participant did go on to talk about a more positive counselling experience offered by the local authority children's services.

“ So I got like a contact card and I rang them up and said – because you could self-refer and so I said, “Can I please book myself in for counselling?”. I've got to say, that was actually amazing. The counsellor that they had there was very, very good. But they could only offer stints of six to eight weeks at a time and it was very much on a – obviously, it seemed like they had a lot of people ... I wish there could have been more but I understand that resources were very limited, especially for being free. But it allowed me to at least put my thoughts in the right place to then move on. Because I actually got that fairly quickly, I think within a matter of weeks. And that helped a lot.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

However, as the participant described, access to the service was problematic, a fact that was also raised in the accounts of other participants. Participants highlighted difficulties in accessing formal support both as children and adults, with an emphasis on the victim and survivor or their family members having to seek out support through NHS and local services.

“ The impression that I got was that there were some resources out there but you had to [be] prepared to fight tooth and nail for them. And for a person who is actually genuinely and consistently struggling, that's nearly impossible to get to.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Several participants had experienced access to more targeted support services to manage particular impacts of the sexual abuse, such as an eating disorder or a physical injury, which led to disclosure to occupational health services and subsequent support which was found to be particularly helpful.

“ And I had one-on-one sessions with her, and that's when it all came out. And she was brilliant. I mean she was totally understanding. And she referred me to [Centre] in [City] to see another clinical psychologist.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

“ He was my one person in the whole of my life who was so boundaried and so professional and so good. He was the only one that I kind of learnt to trust someone and they wouldn't abuse their trust.

Truth Project participant abused in a sports context

Chapter 10

Summary of key findings from the research and victims and survivors' suggestions for change

This chapter provides a summary of the key research findings and themes identified in the report and relevant to the research sub-questions. It reports some of the particular characteristics identified in cases of child sexual abuse in sports contexts. The chapter concludes by detailing the changes participants think are necessary to prevent child sexual abuse in sports contexts in the future and to improve responses to, and support for, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. In doing so it addresses the research sub-question:

- What changes do victims and survivors suggest to improve child protection and prevent child sexual abuse in the future?

10.1 Summary of key findings from the research

This report has detailed experiences of child sexual abuse in sports contexts, the institutional failures in relation to this abuse and the impacts upon victims and survivors. Overall the research findings, drawn from the nine participants' accounts selected for the qualitative analysis, indicate child sexual abuse in sports is generally very similar to abuse carried out in other institutional contexts.¹³ However, the research findings also indicate there are some particular characteristics of sexual abuse in sports contexts.

In contrast to the cases of child sexual abuse in sport involving high-performing or elite athletes that have garnered media attention in recent years, the experiences shared with the Inquiry by participants through the Truth Project reflect more diversity and more 'grassroots' contexts. Although there was clear exploitation and manipulation of victims and survivors by coaches and others involved in sports activities with children in the cases examined in this research, there was little evidence in the nine participants' accounts of perpetrators specifically exploiting the victims and survivors' future career prospects or sporting success as a method of grooming or coercion.

The key research findings concerning child sexual abuse in sports contexts described in this report are:

- Overall the perpetration and experience of child sexual abuse in sports are generally very similar to those concerning sexual abuse carried out in other institutional contexts. The enabling factors for abuse to take place in sports were similar to those found in our other thematic reports into abuse in other contexts and institutions, and included: perpetrators actively approaching parents outside of the sports context to look after or take children out unsupervised; perpetrators arranging overnight stays with children; and a lack of supervision, oversight of adults working in sports, particularly those operating as leaders or as private coaches or instructors.
- Physical contact was a more specific enabling factor found in participants' accounts related to sexual abuse in sports as it is more common in sporting activities and was sometimes used as a pretext by perpetrators to sexually abuse children, for example while swimming or in the foam pit in gymnastics.

¹³ Comparisons between experiences across different institution types and time periods will be made at a later point when we have the opportunity to carry out a fuller comparative analysis.

- For most participants, taking part in sport was not a defining or central factor of their lives as children or the lives of their families, but rather it was part of wider activities and hobbies they enjoyed. However, the links between the families of perpetrators and victims and survivors fostered through sporting activities meant it was particularly difficult for some participants to disclose what was happening to them and some perpetrators were more easily able to abuse siblings as well.
- Sexual abuse by those involved in sports contexts was often perpetrated during overnight stays, trips away and visiting the perpetrator's home, sometimes, but not always, associated with the activities of the sports club or association. Perpetrators also sometimes used sports-related rewards, such as allowing the child to play in a more senior team, as a method of grooming or coercion.
- Although some participants experienced psychological and emotional abuse linked to grooming and manipulation alongside the sexual abuse, none of them described experiencing physical violence or other forms of abuse by perpetrators in sports contexts.
- Most participants did not actively or formally disclose their sexual abuse in a sports context as a child. A key theme discussed by participants was how much they wanted, or tried, to tell someone about what was happening to them but how difficult this was. Adults failed to respond appropriately to behavioural changes or other indicators of concern in children even when these were very apparent. Participants who did manage to disclose as children were often dismissed or ignored and subject to victim-blaming responses by adults in a range of institutions.
- The impacts of experiencing child sexual abuse in sports described by participants are extensive and diverse and similar to those described by victims and survivors of abuse in other contexts. A difference was that despite their experiences of abuse in sporting contexts, participants did not report subsequently desisting from sport and exercising, as a child or later in their lives.

10.2 Victims and survivors' suggestions for change

The majority of participants in the qualitative sample experienced abuse in sports contexts prior to 2000, with the most recent case of abuse occurring in this context almost a decade ago. There have been significant developments in addressing child protection issues in sport since 2000 and some of the suggestions made may already have been implemented. However, we wish to present all suggestions made by these participants as they reflect the issues they felt to be of particular importance in protecting children from abuse. Participants had also experienced many difficulties throughout their lives since the time of the abuse and also shared their views on how victims and survivors of abuse can be better supported in light of those experiences.

Participants' more specific suggestions have been categorised according to three of the four thematic areas outlined by the Chair in the *Inquiry's Interim Report* (Jay et al., 2018), these are: structural; cultural; and professional and political. No participants in this sample made specific suggestions for change with respect to the fourth thematic area; financial.

Table 10.1 represents the specific suggestions for change made by the nine participants in the qualitative sample. These suggestions relate not only to sport but also to external organisations involved in protecting children and in responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse.

Table 10.1 Suggestions for change made by nine qualitative sample Truth Project participants sexually abused in sports contexts

Structural: The legislative, governance and organisational frameworks within and between institutions
<p>Participants said:</p> <p><i>There needs to be better reporting structures at club and league level in sports to address all forms of child abuse.</i></p> <p><i>Stricter rules and regulations need to be imposed to oversee sports clubs that are not affiliated with schools.</i></p> <p><i>All staff and volunteers working with children in sports contexts need to have regular and timely checks made about them.</i></p> <p><i>There needs to be better support and protection for those coming forward to disclose child sexual abuse.</i></p> <p><i>Better education and awareness are required for children and staff working in institutions.</i></p> <p><i>More support and consideration need to be provided for pregnant women with histories of experiencing child sexual abuse.</i></p>
Cultural: The attitudes, behaviours and values that prevent institutions from responding effectively to child sexual abuse
<p>Participants said:</p> <p><i>There is a need to continue raising awareness of child sexual abuse in sports contexts and this will encourage victims and survivors to come forward.</i></p> <p><i>Adults, whether in a professional capacity or not, need to directly ask children if they are experiencing or have experienced abuse where they have suspicions or concerns.</i></p> <p><i>Education for the general public is required about the importance of supporting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and how experiences of non-recent abuse can still affect people throughout their lives.</i></p>
Professional and political: The leadership, professional and practice issues for those working or volunteering in relevant institutions
<p>Participants said:</p> <p><i>Awareness of child sexual abuse should be raised in schools, children should be encouraged and supported to disclose if they need to and provide appropriate counselling and support services when they do.</i></p> <p><i>Teaching about child sexual abuse for those working or volunteering with children needs to improve to cover the full range of abuse and how adults can practically act on what they are taught.</i></p> <p><i>Multi-agency working arrangements across different institutional contexts need to be improved to better support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.</i></p> <p><i>Institutions need to improve the communication they have with victims and survivors of abuse. They need to acknowledge and recognise victims and survivors and inform them what went wrong and what has been done about it.</i></p> <p><i>Institutions, including the police, need to provide more timely and helpful advice about what support is available when first contacted by victims and survivors.</i></p> <p><i>Court processes need to more explicitly and sensitively consider and acknowledge the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors.</i></p>

Appendices

Appendix A

Glossary

Abuse involving penetration	This relates to vaginal, anal or digital penetration and oral sex.
Abuse not involving penetration	This relates to prolonged kissing, cuddling, French kissing and excessive touching. (See 'Fondling' for behaviour involving genital contact.)
Child	A person under the age of 18.
Child sexual abuse	Sexual abuse of children involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact and non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet. Child sexual abuse includes child sexual exploitation.
Child sexual exploitation	Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain.
Criminal justice system	The system which investigates, prosecutes, sentences and monitors individuals who are suspected or convicted of committing a criminal offence. This also encompasses institutions responsible for imprisonment, probation and sentences served in the community.
Episodes of child sexual abuse/ exploitation	<p>An 'episode' relates to sexual abuse involving a particular perpetrator(s) or institution(s). It may involve a single instance of sexual abuse or relate to more than one instance which takes place over a period of time. We have defined an 'episode' of abuse as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● an instance or multiple instances of sexual abuse committed by a single perpetrator● a single instance of sexual abuse committed by multiple perpetrators● multiple instances of sexual abuse committed by multiple perpetrators, but only where there is collusion between the perpetrators. <p>An episode involving multiple perpetrators could include cases where there is collusion between perpetrators, such as gang rape, child sexual exploitation or abuse by networks organised for the purposes of child sexual abuse. An episode could also involve more than one institution, such as abuse perpetrated by one person but in several contexts.</p>

Fondling	This relates to touching, masturbating or kissing a child's genitals and/or making a child fondle an adult's genitals.
Grooming for child sexual abuse	Building a relationship with a child in order to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.
Impact	<p>A marked effect or influence on someone or something.</p> <p>Information on impacts presented in this report align with categorisations used in the Truth Project.</p> <p>It is used in this report to describe what victims and survivors themselves reported about the effects of the abuse they experienced.</p>
Qualitative research	Qualitative research uses words and themes, rather than numbers, to answer research questions. Qualitative social research seeks to observe and understand social situations without measuring them using numbers, for example, through interviews with people involved.
Rapid evidence assessment (REA)	A research methodology used in the identification, quality assessment and synthesis of existing literature on a particular topic. More structured and rigorous than a standard literature review, it is not as exhaustive as a systematic review.
Recovery	The act or process of returning to a positive, former or improved level of functioning following a traumatic experience that caused a decline in levels of functioning and wellbeing.
Re-victimisation	Becoming a victim of violence, crime and abuse, having already been victimised previously.
Safeguarding	Protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking actions to enable all children to have the best life chances.
Sports context	Environment or situation where children and young people take part in organised sports activities (including alongside adult participants), for example in sports clubs, sports institutions or sports associations or where they participate in sporting activity in a sporting or leisure location (for example, a public swimming pool) and the perpetrator works or volunteers there (eg a leisure centre worker or swimming pool lifeguard).
Statutory agencies	Institutions set up by law to carry out public activities.
Victims and survivors	Defined in this report as individuals who have been sexually abused as children.
Violation of privacy	Forcing a child to undress, spying on a child in the bathroom or bedroom for example.

Sources: Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (n.d.); King and Brähler (2019).

Appendix B

Ethics

All social research conducted or commissioned by the Inquiry is subject to approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee. It ensures that all Inquiry research complies with the Inquiry's Research Code of Ethics.¹⁴ The Committee is formed of external academics and experts in addition to relevant internal staff, including a member of the Inquiry's Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel and a member of the Inquiry's Support and Safeguarding Team.

The Truth Project deals with highly sensitive and personal material and the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee ensures that any Truth Project data used for the purposes of research adhere to strict ethical standards. The Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee has approved the use of Truth Project data for research purposes and it is subject to ongoing ethical scrutiny.

All facilitators and assistant facilitators working with victims and survivors in the Truth Project are provided with training by the Research Team before commencing in the role. This training covers the important ethical considerations relevant to conducting Truth Project private sessions, including the importance of informed consent.

Supporting participants

The Inquiry takes a trauma-informed approach to its work, ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of victims and survivors are prioritised. For the Truth Project, this means working with each victim and survivor at different points throughout their engagement with the Truth Project, ensuring they know what to expect, that they feel supported and respected, and that they are given choices as far as possible.

Victims and survivors are able to share their experiences in a range of ways. It is up to the individual to decide what they are comfortable sharing and they can share as much or as little information as they wish. All experiences are shared in an informal, non-legal and confidential manner (with some exceptions when absolutely necessary to keep individuals safe).

Further details about sharing experiences and how participants are supported can be found on the Inquiry's [Truth Project website](#).

¹⁴ <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/1382/view/iicsa-ethical-approval-guidance.pdf>

Consent

Participants receive information about taking part in the Truth Project prior to their participation. This is in the form of a booklet and details are also available on the [Truth Project website](#). The booklet contains a 'consent for research' statement, which informs participants that their information may be used to conduct research throughout the life of the Inquiry, unless they would prefer their information not to be used in this way. The consent statement was piloted and subjected to cognitive testing¹⁵ to ensure that all participants are able to make an informed decision. For participants who are unable to read, for example, consent is sought verbally.

At the start of a private session, all participants are reminded how their information may be used for research by the assistant facilitator, who reads out a number of statements that include how the Inquiry manages their data. Participants can choose to opt out of research at this point. They also receive information that they can change their mind and withdraw consent both during or after their session has taken place or they have submitted their written experience. Participants can ask to have their information removed from the analysis and reports up until the point that reports are finalised for publication. The supporting material provided to Truth Project participants also includes information about who they can contact if they decide that they do not want their information to be used in research.

In the event that a participant shares an experience with the Truth Project on more than one occasion, they hear the statements about how the Inquiry manages their data on each occasion.

Further information about how Truth Project data is collected, managed and used in our research can be found in [Truth Project Research: Methods](#).

¹⁵ Cognitive testing is a process which tests the understandability of consent materials and the way in which individuals use this information to make decisions regarding participation (Willis, 2006).

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