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Are Irish state services failing to protect children from sexual abuse?

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Abstract

This project sought to collate an understanding of professional attitudes, beliefs and experiences working with victims of child sexual abuse in Irish society at this present time. Data was gathered using ten semi-structured in-depth interviews. Thematic qualitative analysis was implemented to analyse participant perspectives on the adequacy of current Irish state services regarding child sexual abuse. Generated data from ten participants comprised of both genders with an estimated mean age of thirty-eight and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in Ireland. This report found strong prevailing themes emerging from the gathered literature and analysis. Participants provided additional information to the analysis when reflecting on past and present experiences working with victims of child sexual abuse in Ireland.

While it is perceived that Ireland is failing to protect children from abuse in the current society, it is in truth the inadequacy and lack of funding by the state that further inhibits inadequately trained personnel in the area of child protection. This furthermore reflects on the inefficient services available for child victims of sexual abuse.

Introduction

The body of literature intends to explore Irish state services in the area of child sexual abuse. Investigation into core professional roles such as social workers, members of An Garda Síochána, teachers, psychotherapists and youth workers is vital for efficient protection for children in the Irish society. This subject area was chosen based on a personal interest to the researcher. The researcher had minimal experience working within a child protection service and wished to furthermore investigate the services available for the children of sexual abuse.

In this project the researcher gathered literature consisting of surrounding aspects involved with child sexual abuse in Ireland. This includes the definition of Child sexual abuse, who abuses, where the abuse occurs, what services are available, societies mandatory requirement and the current Irish state in response to this increasing social issue.

This project will include the beneficial method and procedure of analysis carried out by the researcher. Explorations of the main five themes identified, containing sub-themes to furthermore dive in-depth into the theme wholly based on child sexual abuse in Ireland.

Literature

1.1 What is Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Understanding child sexual abuse in Ireland is fundamental in order to provide relevant knowledge on this complex prevalent social issue. A child is defined as a person less than 18 years of age who is not or has not been married (Citizens information, 2009). Children First is Ireland's national guidance for the protection and welfare of children. Children First (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 9) define sexual abuse as; “*Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others*” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 9). This comprises of exposure of sexual organs or any sexual act that is intentionally performed in the presence of a child; intentional touching (molesting) of the child’s body whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification; masturbation in the presence of the child or the involvement of the child in an act of masturbation; sexual intercourse with the child (oral, vaginal or anal); sexual exploitation of a child, which includes inciting, encouraging, propositioning that permits a child to engage in prostitution or sexual acts (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 9). Sexual exploitation also transpires when a child is involved in the exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act. It can consist of emotional, verbal, physical or sexual assault in which all forms of abuse can overlap (Stolinsky, 2002, p.5). This includes recording and image capturing on any form of media. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse may similarly ‘groom’ the child to believing they are someone they are not and illustrate explicit sexual material via the internet etc. (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 9). Conversely the above definition and description of child sexual abuse, taken from Children First (Department of children and Youth Affairs, 2011), is not a legal definition and is not intended to be a description of the criminal offence of sexual assault (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 10).

Nestor (2004, p. 33) states that child sexual abuse has particularly been highlighted in the Irish public domain in the last two decades. The SAVI Report was the first national survey report conducted on sexual violence in Ireland in 2001 (McGee et al., 2002). The report aimed to gather statistical evidence through intense research to approximate the various forms of sexual violence among Irish men and women across their life span from childhood through adulthood. Additional aims to the research were as to investigate who had been abused and

who the predators are in Ireland. SAVI (McGee et al., 2002) highlight that the transition from childhood into adulthood as a vulnerable period for abuse to occur.

1.2 Who, where and when does abuse take place

According to the Children First Bill, sexual abuse is a hidden crime and frequently perpetrated by persons in a position of trust such as parents, extended family members, neighbours or family friends (Children First Bill, 2012, p.4). Child abuse typically arises in the family home or in a place that is familiar to the child (McGee et al., 2002, p.83). In the SAVI report (McGee et al., 2002, p.85) the term „incest’ was used to define „penetrative contact by any relative of the individual, whether or not they are blood related’. Incest has proven to have a high impact on an individual’s psychological development, although we do not know the extent or long term effect childhood events have in shaping our emotional wellbeing into adulthood (Cheal, 2002, p.81). Agreeing with Cheal (2002), Stolinsky (2002, p.7) mentions how secretive and manipulative interfamilial abuse can cause negative impacts on the situation inhibiting a child’s psychological functioning.

The CARI annual report highlights the significant issue around the new Irish phenomenon of blended families (CARI, 2011, p.7). This is when children from different biological parents are moulded into a family structure and living in a shared household. Abuse in a blended family home can sometimes occur from a step-brother or step-sister. The victim of the sexual abuse is naturally traumatised as they are articulated by their biological parent to treat the new members of the household like a brother/sister or indeed mother/father of their own. This is a case that is seen to be extremely traumatic and very difficult for a victim to recuperate from (CARI, 2011, p.7). SAVI report (McGee et al., 2002) and correspondingly the National Strategy plan (2010) highlight an increasing proportion of Irish society that has experienced and continues to experience various forms of unwanted sexual contacted by predators within their family home yet do not disclose information about the abuse to others. *„Disclosure of sexual violence to professionals was strikingly low’* (McGee et al., 2002, p.38). This is by reason of the persons feeling ashamed or even blaming themselves for the abuse (McGee et al., 2002, p.38).

1.3 Attachment Theory

John Bowlby's theory of attachment is the emotional bond between people. Bowlby believes that an attachment does not have towards mother but any *trusted campaign* (Bowlby, 1973, p.201). This theory can provide a source for understanding what a child may be experiencing during their abuse. Bowlby alleges that when a child is afraid they will turn to a trusted campaign that is both accessible and responsive for comfort (Bowlby, 1973, p. 201). When the trusted campaign is an abuser, that provides a secure home that is comfortable and warm, this can cause confusion for the child (Howe, 1995, p. 53). If a care giver is neglectful towards an emotional bond with a child, the child may develop characteristics of avoidant attachment. This is where a child will avoid relying of a caregiver for help or comfort. Bowlby believes this can cause future problems in relationship formation.

1.4 Who is involved in protecting children from sexual abuse?

Parents and guardians have the main responsibility to care and protect their children. According to the Irish Statute Book under the Childcare Act 1991, the HSE has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection in Ireland. The act imposes the duty of care from every health board in the area to care and protect children that are believed not to be receiving adequate care and protection in their family home.

Within Ireland two main agencies involved in child protection are An Garda Siochana and the Health Boards (HSE). Health Boards are a government arrangement to proceed on all reported cases of child abuse in Ireland. The Irish Health Board and An Garda Siochana work collectively implementing the welfare and protection of children. Forms of abuse such as physical, sexual and wilful neglect of child are crimes which the Health Board must report to the Gardai and vice versa. Under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 anyone that engages in sexual contact or interferences with a child under the age of seventeen has committed a criminal offence (Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, p.4). Both agencies cooperate sensitively when taken legal action protecting a child or any other child from future harm. Members of the health boards and Gardai require as much information possible to fully assess the situation.

Irish law is clear regarding the importance to maintain contact between parents and children. According to Kilkelly, (2008, p.301) the majority of children in Ireland, in state care, are those from voluntary care orders where parents willing compromise and work with services involved in child protection and welfare. The HSE are required to care and protect children of voluntary care orders until their parents or guardians are able to provide adequate care and protection for their children. An emergency care order is a last resort where there is „harsh interference’ within families, and parents are denied access to their children in care (Kilkelly, 2008, p. 293). An emergency care order can be put in place where a child under twelve years of age; a member of the Gardaí has the authority to enter a house or vehicle without a warrant to remove the child from „suspected’ danger (Kilkelly, 2008, p.290). A child protection plan is then put in place. This is an inter-agency plan created by a team of professionals outlining actions to be taken to ensure protection and welfare of a child.

As a member of Irish society, you too are responsible for the protection and welfare for children. If you have any suspicions to believe a child in your care is being abused either in their home or elsewhere, it is a mandatory requirement to report your concerns. Under The Protection of Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 (Irish Statute Book), anyone can report suspected abuse cases as long as the report is not fabricated or made as a malicious act. This act was introduced to permit the public to feel comfortable to report child cases of abuse. Under the proposed legislation of the Children First Bill (2012), if you fail to report a case of child abuse or neglect that should have been reported, you could be liable for conviction to a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both (Children First Bill, 2012, p. 13).

1.5 Effective Services

The revised Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, was published in July 2011. It provides guidance for individuals and organisations in identifying and responding appropriately to cases of child abuse and neglect. Children First highlight the significance of child-centred multi-disciplinary approaches in organisations and services. Commitment is needed by personnel to achieve an effective and efficient multi-disciplinary team through the implementation of interagency communication between all parties, such as staff and services. The lack of inter-agency communication is resulting in the lack of care for children in Ireland (Buckley, 2011, p.13-14).

Children First (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) furthermore emphasise the importance of multi-disciplinary, inter-agency communication in the management of reports of alleged abuse cases. Good practice in organisations should promptly provide feedback when appropriate to other staff and services. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p. 20) have recorded the *need* for change in hierarchical organisations as the distance between senior management and junior staff is causing suffering due to not receiving regular formal and informal communication within the organisation.

The government have highlighted the importance of recruiting the correct personnel for positions at hand. It is essential for principle management and supervision to ensure safety and protection of children within organisations, groups and clubs. It is exceedingly important personnel are adequately trained in the positions in which they occupy. Organisations in Ireland are required to provide training for those working directly with children and those that have access to children in the organisation, to have adequate training in accordance with the guidance and standards of the HSE under the Safe Guarding Guidance for Organisations (Children First Bill, 2012, p.5). The organisation is also required to have their own „Keep Children Safe Plan’ that is appropriate to the nature and services the organisation provides (Children First Bill, 2012, p.5). Child protection training is necessary to raise awareness and information in order to identify and respond to suspicions and incidents of child abuse efficiently.

According to Children First National Guidelines (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p.5) organisations that work directly with children must have a designated officer to adequately address reported suspected cases of child abuse and neglect within the organization. The designated officer must work within the organisation as they have sole responsibility to deal with cases of abuse and neglect and ensuring effective procedures are followed in compliance with legislation within the organisation. The designated officer is assigned to drive the implementation of the proposed Children First Bill and ensuring the organisation complies with the legislation (Children First Bill, 2012, p. 5).

1.6 The Irish State Child Protection System

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs promote themselves as fully committed to protection of children and young citizens of Ireland in which they work with, in accordance with Children First (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p.5). The Child Protection Policy is based upon the multiple context of the UN Convention on the Rights of a

Child, Childcare Act 1991, Children First: National Guidance, Our Duty to Care and the National Children's Strategy. The policy priorities focus on early interventions and support for the children that are seen to be most at risk of receiving inadequate care in their family home. The policy aims to create a balance between protecting the child/children along with respecting their rights and needs as individuals within society. The prevention, detection and protection of children from cases of child abuse requires a multidisciplinary approach from all services that work with children, along with effective management and correct training procedures for all personnel working with children. The Office for the Minister for Children aims to create a safe and healthy environment for all children and young people in Ireland through the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and code of behaviour working with young people.

The revised *Children First* outlines significant changes since 1999 to the Irish state service system and the policy framework in Ireland. November 2000, The National Children's strategy was published. It was the first conclusive national policy document of Ireland that included statutory and non-statutory services for children aimed to improve the lives of children in Ireland. Ireland adopted the UN Convention on the rights of a Child in 1992. The National Children's strategy generated a ten year plan, consisting of three main goals to improve the lives of the children in Ireland in accordance with the UN Convention on the rights of a Child. The plan included children's participation, research and improving supports and services for children in Ireland. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs monitor the effectiveness and implementation of the National Children's strategy goals. They note the overall aim of the combined goals, of the national policy, to create an environment where children of Ireland are respected and valued as citizens; where all children are appreciated as individuals within their family and society; with the support of family and their community each individual can reach their full potential (Children First Aims, 2011, p.5).

In November 2012 we saw changes made in the constitution to protect the rights of children in Ireland. Removal of article 42.5 was replaced with the new revised article in the constitution, 42A. Article 42A recognises that children have rights and the law will now recognise and protect their rights as children. The submission of article 42A enables the state more authority to protect children. It provides strong constitutional foundations for our child protection system in Ireland where the state has power to act when the safety and welfare of children are at risk. Also under article 42A2.2 children are given the opportunity of being

adopted where the parents of the child have met a high threshold of failure towards their child. Adoption can only take place when it is in the best interest of the child at hand and all other options have failed. In addition the article allows parents, married or unmarried, to voluntarily place their children for adoption. The personal perspective and opinions of the child are taken into account such as adoption, guardianship, custody etc. when the judge is determining the outcome for the child's welfare and protection.

Services such as Barnardos continue to challenge the Irish state to change and improve Governmental laws, policies and procedures across all areas that affect children's lives. Barnardos believe that it is vital for children's voices to be heard in the area of policy making as it is through their assistance in the creation of policies that there will be more of a child centred approach in the policies and laws in Ireland (Barnardos, 2013). Barnardos influence the policy system through mass mediums such as public awareness, media, political meetings with the Irish Government and opposition parties and also meetings with stakeholders and policy makers (Barnardos, 2013). Through their great efforts Barnardos, along with other organisations and services, have a huge driving force into a positive change for children in the future in Ireland.

1.6 Gaps in Child Protection State Services

It can be argued that Ireland does not provide sufficient care for children in Ireland. Kilkelly (2008, pg.288) specifies that child protection is categorised by priority in Ireland. Social workers do their utmost to deal with case work over load. Realistically they are unable to respond to thousands of suspected cases of abuse. Judge Mr. Justice Ryan (Roche, 2011) told the conference organised by the HSE, University College Cork and the Irish Association of Social Workers, that state failings to protect children from abuse cases were both individual and institutional. Individuals failed to detect and report suspected abuse cases.

It took cases such as the Roscommon Case to occur for Irish state services to see „gaps' in the child welfare and protection system and *learn* from the circumstances (One in Four, 2010, p. 5). The children of the Roscommon case were in care of the HSE for six years without detecting the extent of the abuse and neglect these children encountered in their family home by their parents since 1989. Since the birth of the first child the Public Health Nurse was regularly involved with the family following a report made from a concerned neighbour to the Superintendent Public Health Nurse. The report expressed beliefs of alcohol abuse by the parents. An inquiry team regularly checked on the family and the welfare of the

child. The inquiry team hold evident reports which confirm attendance of the Public Health Nurse to the family home but there are no evident notes by the nurse revealing indications of alcohol consumption by the parents. Furthermore there is no record of a formal follow up of discussion with the Superintendent Public Health Nurse about concerns of the welfare and protection of the first born child (One in Four, 2010, p.19). The inquiry team could not find social work files on record for the period October 1997 to January 1998 (One in Four, 2010, p.24). Vital information and key signs that abuse was possibly taken place was not noted by the social workers, such as the issues of a child's speech and language difficulties (One in Four, 2010, p.27).

More recently the media highlighted the Ryan Report. The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (The Ryan Report) was published May 2009 due to the submerging clerical child sexual abuse cases in Ireland in 2009 (The Department for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009). The Report included recommendations to improve the lives of children in Ireland. The report focussed on the Government Departments and institutions that were responsible for the services in that period of time in question. The Irish Government accepted all the recommendations made by the Commission and were fully committed to the implementation of the report. The report aimed to Address the effects of past abuse; Developing and strengthening national child care policy and evaluating its implementation; Strengthening the regulation and inspection function; Improving the organisation and delivery of children's services; Giving greater effect to the voice of the child and Revising Children First, the national guidance for the protection and welfare of children and underpinning the guidance by way of legislation (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009).

Additional funding was provided to tackle the emerging issue of clerical abuse in Ireland through the introduction of The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. Fifteen million euro in 2010 was provided to the HSE to progress various actions such as the recruitment of additional social workers (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009). Funding was also provided to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to allow the commencement of inspections of child protection services and the Office for Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. HIQA is an independent, powerful, organisation that is responsible for the inspection of a numeral HSE services for children and young people in Ireland. HIQA are also responsible for driving improvements in quality and safety of healthcare on behalf of all patients, including children, in care services in Ireland

(HIQA, 2013). HIQA assess services to ensure they are following standards required for the service.

Ireland's child protection system is based on legislation and policy. The legislation comes from the Child Care Act 1991 and the Children Act 2001, which is seen to be only seen to be partially implemented (Childlinks, 2006, p.3). In 2004, the Health Service Executive figures show that there was 6,188 allegations of child abuse were made; 1,425 were deemed to be proven cases of child abuse, 363 (15%) were found to be unsubstantiated, while 3,557 (60%) had yet to be resolved in 2006 (Childlinks, 2006, p.9). Recent research discovered that the cases of child sexual abuse have continued to increase from 2007-2010 in Ireland (HSE, 2012, p.39). In 2010, 1556 cases of child abuse were confirmed cases whilst there were yet 12,825 child protection reports received but not investigated (HSE, 2012, p.41), this may be due to the financial constraints of the country which is utterly unacceptable (HSE, 2012, p.80). *„The quality of statistical information on child abuse and child protection activity in Ireland is unsatisfactory' (Childlinks, 2006, p.3).*

The review of literature defines child sexual abuse, perpetrators of the abuse and where abuse is likely to occur. The literature outlines the historical understanding of the social problem in Ireland. The potential Children First guidelines generate hope for services and organisations to produce an adequate provision to provide care and protection for children in Ireland. This study should allow insight into the effective practise of professionals under Children First guidelines in child protection services.

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section anticipates the design of this research, participants involved, apparatus entailed and ultimately the procedure method used to accomplish the research accurately. In addition, the procedure will examine the data collection method and method used to analyse information received from the samples. Furthermore this section will highlight the ethics involved throughout the research process.

2.2 Design

A qualitative approach was adopted sequentially to gain rich data required to answer the complex research question through analysis. Qualitative research is paramount to accumulate creative data when striving to discover and explore information regarding a particular topic through analysis of information in the „real world’, as opposed to quantitative analysis. Blaxter et al. (2001, p. 64), highlight qualitative research to be more detailed with a focus and aim to achieve „depth’ rather than a quantitative approach of „breadth’ in a sociological research project. Qualitative research methods, allow the researcher gain a further insight into the professional’s roles and responsibilities, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, theoretical perspectives and experiences involved in research area of child sexual abuse in Ireland (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.3). According to Burns (1997, p. 329) an interview is conducted face to face verbal exchange where an interviewer attempts to retrieve information, beliefs, attitudes or opinions from another person based on a specific topic.

2.3 Sample Participants

Samples used for the research were purposively chosen to represent a segment of professionals in child protection organisations in Ireland. Along with purposive sampling, theoretical sampling is selecting a group of samples to study based on their professional relevance to the research study (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 167). The specific samples chosen were guaranteed to possess required information for this research (Kumar, 2011, p. 159). Sample participants were taken from highly recognised core organisations and services in Ireland. A sample size of ten participants consisted of both male and female participants,

estimated mean age of thirty-eight years old and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Purposive samples were deliberately chosen as they have all remained working within the area of child protection and welfare for a minimum of five years. The researcher conducted ten semi-structured in-depth interviews on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis with ten professionals from the following sample groups; An Garda Siochana, Youth worker, Social worker, Policy officer, Teacher, Special Needs Assistant, Childcare worker, Psychotherapists, Counsellor. Diversity of samples ensured research validity as the interview process identifies common patterns and themes throughout data.

2.4 Apparatus

The interviews were carried out in the organisations and services of the participants. Apparatus used for the interview process included information sheets, consent form, two clip boards, a pen, two recording devices, usb key and a password protected computer.

The clip board was used to attach the questions to for the samples and the researcher, to comfortably read the interview questions along with the researcher whilst reading out the questions in the interview, if needed. The pen was used for the sample to date and sign the consent form before conducting the interview and also for the interviewer to take notes when and if needed. Two Dictaphones were also used to utilize the interviews; one of the Dictaphones was used as a supporting device if the primary Dictaphone failed to record the interview. A usb key was used to store interviews on a password protected laptop.

2.5 Analytical Framework

A semi structured interview process was an appropriate method for this piece of research due to sensitivity of the topic. This gave the researcher ability to guide sample participants in sensitive areas and also gave the researcher the opportunity to explain questions, if necessary. It is less likely questions will be misunderstood by the sample if the researcher has the opportunity to explain questions thoroughly throughout the interview process. In addition it permitted the interviewer to clarify information given by the sample to ensure validity and, once again, confirm information given. A face-to-face interview allowed the researcher to gain further interpretation of the samples and their experiences evolved around child sexual

abuse in Ireland through observations of non-verbal body language, pitch and tone of their voice and ultimately their facial expressions which would not have been detected on the recording device (Kumar, 2011, p. 150).

Interviews were conducted orally through the style of narrative analysis which is seen to be a very powerful tool in research (Kumar, 2011, p. 161). Particularly when it is a sensitive topic based on real life experiences, it is a good idea to ask the sensitive question and allow the sample to narrate their experiences, opinions and beliefs (Chase, 2005, p.655). Occasionally the interviewer will non-verbally prompt the sample through facial expressions, body language or nodding their heading as a sign of understanding and listening technique (Kumar, 2011, p. 161).

The researcher gathered data through the implementation of fifteen in-depth, non-leading questions in a semi-structured interview format on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis with ten professional participants in order to understand if the current state services are failing to protect children from sexual abuse in Ireland. The interviews were semi-structured with a combination of flexibility (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.141). The interviews were conversational allowing for exploration, although there were pre-planned questions to address the social issue and therefore guide the interview process. Open ended questions were used to initiate rich in-depth plentiful information from samples. Open-ended questions allowed for emerging of new ideas from samples as they are given the freedom to answer questions in their own words, a crucial role in the analysis process. This also kept the samples engaged and interested in the interview process (Kumar, 2011, p. 158). The interviewer prepared a list of contemporary issues, per professional, they desired to discuss if the sample did not provide plentiful information throughout the questions in the interview process (Kumar, 2011, p. 161).

Prior to beginning each interview both recording devices were tested to confirm they were working accordingly. A pilot interview was carried out on a sample group, similar to the samples that took part in this research. The idea of performing a critical pilot interview was to highlight potential problem areas within the interview questions, layout/structure and understanding of the research (Kumar, 2011, p. 158).

On completion of all ten interviews the researcher transcribed data received and transferred onto a software system NVivo on a password protected computer.

2.6 Method of Analysis

Thematic qualitative researchers use software such as QSR NVivo 10 to help breakdown, manage and shape unstructured information. Thematic analysis is the most common method used to identify and analyse patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Bazeley (2007) signifies thematic analysis is a process used for encoding qualitative data. A six step method was used to understand and identify shared opinions, beliefs and experiences surrounding this social crisis in Ireland. This six step method assisted the researcher searching through data to discover repeated themes and patterns within analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.86-93).

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research there were ethical considerations when conducting a research directly with professionals in this sensitive focus area. Before conducting any interviews, all samples of this research was delivered an information letter prior to the interview which outlined the research and the specific aims in which the researcher wished to prove. It was significant participants understood the entirety of the research project they intended to partake in (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 65). In addition samples were made aware that they would be voice recorded using a Dictaphone audio recording device in the information letter and yet again reminded in person prior to conducting the interview.

Prior to conducting the research, each sample was aware upon contact that this research will be confidential and data collected would not be used for any other purpose. Furthermore the information received would be stored on a password protected laptop. It is unethical for the researcher to be bias therefore any information received from the samples was not be fabricated or falsely presented to sway or mislead readers of this research (Kumar, 2011, p. 246). The researcher had genuine interest proving their research question they had produced based on their personal perception of the professionals, organizations and services involved in their area of child protection in Ireland.

The researcher was aware of the sensitivity of the topic and furthermore aware of the questions asked to the samples. An important aspect was that all samples were professionals that work in the area of child protection and has experience in relation to child sexual abuse in their organization/service in Ireland. Although the researcher was aware of the sample

professional backgrounds, the researcher approached questions with sensitivity to avoid concern arising from the interview procedure. On completion of the interview, a discussion took place among the researcher and the sample. This was an opportunity to debrief the sample on the sensitive social issue to avoid the participants being self-damaged by their participation in this research (Babbie, 2007, p.67).

Following ethical guidelines ensures the needs and concerns of the samples will be considered throughout the research. By conveying this information to the samples involved a corporate virtual bond of trust is established between the research and the sample (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.105).

Analysis Results

The underlining aim of this research was to understand the adequacy of state child protection services from a professional participant perspective. This was accomplished by conducting ten semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews. Aspiration of this research was to determine if existing state services are sufficient to protect children from sexual abuse in Ireland. Congregated analysis provided a reflection on the previous assembled literature for this research.

Five significant themes emerged from this research. Explanatory interviews carried out were aimed at individual levels of their professional experience working within the area of child protection. Several questions were redesigned for those in a slightly lower profession within child protection. Themes connected all samples of the research simultaneously. In this research participants were deliberately selected to contribute to generate new findings of the whether the current Irish state services are adequate to protect child from sexual abuse. The objective of ten professionals chosen to convey parallel experiences of the individuals involved in regards to five significant themes:

- Victims of CSA
- Professional Routes
- The Irish State “Loop holes”
- The Media
- Psychodynamics of Child Sexual Abuse

Themes emerged directly from the professional experiences working with children that were victims of sexual abuse within child protection in Ireland.

3.1 Victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in Ireland

Comprehension of the victims of CSA is an important aspect of society – who is the abusers, how children feel and the services that are available to help children through this traumatic ordeal in their life.

3.1.1 Indicators

Sexual abuse victim orientated service, participant seven, notes a primary indicator that signifies a child is experiencing sexual abuse:

The primary indicators is a comment or an utterance, a comment that's something has happened to them. It could be toileting or bathing but a comment from a child is the the primary indicator that something bad has happened to them. A less, a less prominent indicator would be a behaviour or a presentation and what I mean by that is a sexualised behaviour within the child that seems to be beyond their years – Participant Seven

Secondary indicators are observed by professionals in schools and clubs:

...their speech is sexually mature for their age or inappropriate touching other children. – Participant One

3.1.2 Vulnerability

Children are vulnerable and unable to protect themselves. Abused children are even more vulnerable. Children are defenceless and may be oblivious to any danger they may be in. Participants in this study made reference to child vulnerability and the expectant role of an adult authority figure which is sometimes the abuser:

...children are vulnerable and defenceless and need an adult to act on their behalf – Participant Two

Children are a particularly vulnerable group within society because of their age ya know they need to be cared for. They need to be minded by someone older so their very vulnerable but in those groups of young people there's even more vulnerable young people. – Participant Seven

...people who prey on children are out there and go ya know after any kind of kids but ya know often unfortunately the most vulnerable kids are kids that are in socially deprived areas – Participant Six

Primarily children are vulnerable. All participants address the importance of caring for children due to their vulnerability in society.

3.1.3 Relationship with perpetrator of the abuse

Psychotherapist, participant four, works in an organisation that strictly works with referral victims of CSA. Participant revealed:

75% of children that are abused are abused by somebody that they know. So that would either be somebody very close within their family or outside the family but known to the family. – Participant Four

It's our experience that children tend to minimise their experience so as not to get the adult perpetrator into trouble. Because they would have formed a relationship with that person, whether it's somebody outside of the home or somebody within the home. – Participant Four

Evident from the above statements, perpetrators are known to the child. Perpetrators utilize a mechanism to manipulate children. Children are vulnerable and seek the reason for why this immoral experience has happened to them:

The abuse is secretive and the abuser would be manipulative and that's why children don't really tell people ,cause they think it's their fault or they done something wrong for something bad to happen to them. – Participant Two

As identified in the literature, abuse generally takes place when a relationship has formed between the child and the perpetrator. The perpetrator creates a loving friendship bond with the child that furthermore inhibits the child to keep the abuse secretive. Participants regularly made reference to the significance of a relationship formation.

3.2 Professional Routes

Social workers, psychotherapists and school counsellors began at the bottom of an organisational hierarchy and worked their way the hierarchy through training and education. They have all experienced working at the bottom of a hierarchy of an organisation. Principal social worker, participant seven, explains his journey:

I've been here fourteen years in this post. Before that I was the principal social worker in a school for children with intellectual disabilities and before that I was a social worker team leader working in a child protection, a child protection and

welfare team and also I had the responsibility for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.....before that id done my social work training and before that I worked in focus Ireland in youth homelessness and before that I was only nineteen or twenty I studied addiction counselling in Trinity. – Participant Seven

I have worked in the organisation for twelve, coming onto thirteen years. I am a qualified psychotherapist and I manage a team of six people in the help line and I also coordinate appointments and link in with the therapists in relation to their on-going therapy work. – Participant Four

3.2.1 Professional Training

During the central process of conducting the interviews it was evident how strongly professionals felt about the element of training. In order to deliver an adequate and efficient child protection service, initial training in child protection is fundamental. Care workers such as teachers, childcare workers and special needs assistants are core to identifying signs of abuse at home.

...teachers and schooling staff are the core to that, they are the key in highlighting suspicious bruising, behaviours, indicators of abuse you know. – Participant Six

To you knowledge is all staff adequately trained to deal with suspected and actual cases of child sexual abuse? – Researcher

- *No they are not. All the courses, such as child protection I done myself out of my own free time. A lot of the staff wouldn't even know the indicators or signs of abuse apart from the visible signs which is very unsatisfactory for the children we work with. – Participant One*

- *No there not particularly actually trained. I will say that every member of staff in this organisation em has done child protection at some stage or other but in terms of training in what to do when we receive the information and dealing with it....well the training is very weak. – Participant Five*

Evidently, from above, insufficient training would impact professional abilities to detect signs of sexual abuse when they do not comprise efficient training. Secondly inconsistency of training for professionals would also have an impact on the service provided for children. Furthermore it leaves the „ground’ workers in a position to inadequately identify key indicators of abuse:

Yes I did a course about ten months ago. The staff had the option to do it but it was encouraged that all staff should have it and the eh the job paid for it. The majority of us did do the course but there’s some that didn’t. I think it’s so beneficial because it just makes you more aware and know that sexual abuse is a problem and need to be dealt with effectively and it’s us on the ground that need to look out for the signs to spot if any child is been abused. – Participant Two

It should be mandatory...once you do child protection training there is no mandatory requirement eh that you do it again say in three years’ time or four years...So the requirement is that you do child protection training but in terms of over seeing it and enforcing it and keeping up with the changes of the law and dealing with the exposure of information well then that’s very weak so I would say that has to be looked at as well and its up to organisations from whatever perspective that may be youth work, the HSE, social care of how they operate their organisation you know. – Participant Five

On the other hand, there is apparent strong level of training for the hierarchical organisations in child protection:

Absolutely yes as a sexual service we recruit people with very high skills in the area of children, child welfare, child protection and then we have our own induction process here which we do, it generally takes about three months before someone is actually working ya know so we recruit people that are already skilled in the area and the specific areas of work but the „Place Name model’ through induction eh trains people up to and its constant peer supervision, clinical supervision, professional development so we all get that, myself included to ensure that we enhance our skills and don’t, so we don’t get complacent in what we do ya know. – Participant Seven*

3.2.2 Keeping children safe

Educating children about appropriate and inappropriate experiences dispatched from adults is now initiated into school programmes. Special needs assistant participant explains how she has been involved in implementing the „Stay Safe’ programme into the school and how the programme is altered for the various stages of childhood development:

We have Stay Safe programme in our school that runs from junior infants right the way up till sixth. It’s very basic, more a less for the junior infants it was about feelings and touches such as touching your hands and what doesn’t feel good – isn’t good. In sixth class the rule of thumb would be, any person – parent, relative or other, does not have the right to touch you anywhere that your swimsuit might cover. And the „StaySafe Programme’ really does cover a fair amount of that information. The information sheet is sent home to parents to read and sign and to discuss with their children at home and then sent back into school. – Participant One

Garda Sergeant spoke regarding the first initial instinct is future protection when the Gardaí receive a report of child abuse in a family home:

There’s no point ringing the HSE out of hours to assist the child the next child as that child could be put into further danger. Now and again the guards just have to lift and take and then the HSE would have to do something about it. – Participant Six

Have you ever had to do that? - Researcher

Oh god ye loads...(long pause) often ye it can be emotional em for the kids like. Em often in the family there’s a lot of emotion going on there anyway – Participant Six

As mentioned by Garda sergeant, professionals that work in child protection generate their priorities around keep the children safe. Throughout interview procedures all professionals vouched for their professional characteristics to protect children from abuse. Garda sergeant additionally deals with the criminal aspect of committing child sexual abuse, highlights that children are priority:

Well if somebody, like I said earlier, is believed to be a danger to children then that person, the child has to be kept safe, that’s number one priority. – Participant Six

3.3 The Irish State

The Irish state is the statutory body that protects children from abuse in Ireland. The elaborations from samples varied on their vision of the role of the Irish state.

3.2.1 Insufficiencies

High Profile services speak of the „Loop Holes’ in the current state policies and procedures causing inadequate protection for children:

Just currently, its legal loopholes and the lack of resources on the ground. We have certainly come across cases em in the projects that we work with of em, for example domestic violence situations where one adult was perpetrating severe domestic violence on the partner and the children were witnessing it. Place name phoned up the social work services and said “listen can you address this issue to make sure the children are either taken away or that the mum was ok” and just told sorry resources are too skint that’s not a serious enough case. – Participant Three*

3.3.2 Frustration

The shortage, inaccessibility and wait list for social workers in Ireland, was a topical issue expressed by participants:

Yes there should be more social workers. There should be more people who are trained to spot and deal and help children. – Participant One

...based on the parents that we support and the people that we deal with and the frustrations that people come up against are waiting lists, lack of services. Emm waiting lists to see the social worker, waiting lists for assessments, then waiting lists for therapies, waiting lists for cases that are going into court in relation to custody and access around child sexual abuse or trauma. There isn’t enough professionals and staff in place to deal with the amount of cases that are getting reported every year. – Participant Four

Moreover members of An Garda Siochana, which works directly with social workers, find

the inability to contact social workers frustrating:

We're saying we can't get in contact with the HSE all these issues need to be resolved. – Participant Six

Analysis revealed individual professionals are utmost disgusted with the current Irish state system:

The state are failing our children. If children come forward, make a disclosure and it's brought to the authorities and nothing is done. – Participant One

There isn't enough money put into the services. – Participant Four

3.3.3 Interagency Communication

Communication between services is important as to not to overlook the possibilities a child might be experiencing sexual abuse.

...there is always going to be a lack of interdisciplinary services because of everyone being a bit territorial in their work but I will say that they have made huge significant improvements in trying to address and improve interagency – Participant Three

I still see that there's so systematic approach and willingness in coordination to tackle all of these and it's left to individuals within organisations to actually do the work so. It would be much easier if we all worked together – Guards, social workers, youth workers, care workers, doctors, the whole lot would see improvements. – Participant Five

Literature addressed the relevancy of communication within and between services for adequate child protection.

3.3.4 Improving Legislation

All professionals interviewed took immense relief when the Children's Referendum was passed in 2012. Yet only one sample spoke about the incredible work carried out by the minister for children, Frances Fitzgerald:

Frances Fitzgerald of Finnagal has done a huge amount of work, especially in the economic climate, getting the value of childhood and childhood protection into law, she is equally trying to get Children First into statutory footing, absolutely, she would be incredible to get that through but the referendum I think she was remarkable that she got it pushed through. – Participant Seven

The Children's Referendum gave the children of Ireland a voice. Participant four notes that children are important and society needs to change:

I think parents and society need to shift their emphasis on listening to children. I think the referendum we just had will help people to realise that children need support and if children are saying something then they have to take it seriously. – Participant Four

One of the innovative pieces of legislation mentioned was *grooming legislation*. With the increase use of the internet by children the Irish state is trying their utmost to enforce this through for the safety and protection for children:

1997 act em there's a piece of legislation, there's an offence if you try to entice a child or lure a child into a position where they view child pornography or they are exposed to child pornography or they are made to be in child pornography situation or prostitution situation. The bit that's missing in the present legislation is the grooming part. Which means for when, for example if a child is online in a chat room and a man poses, let's say a man, pose as a friend to the child and befriends them, tries to get to know them and arranges to meet them. Then the adult has intentionally gone out of their way to try and literally groom this child into believing that they are a friend, that there's no risk of danger and that. And I em think there's an absence of legislation around that of actually trying to groom the child that they are safe and secure. Hopefully there's a piece of legislation coming this year around that. – Participant Three

3.4 The Media

Beyond the issues of who, what and where child abuse occurs, the foundation of the media is to highlight the social issue in society. High quality distribution of the media generates public debates.

3.4.1 Society

The media is seen as a key factor in distributing facts about on-going issues such as child sexual abuse. Participants anticipate the role of the media:

The media really have a big role to play in highlighting this issue. – Participant One

It's shocking the amount of reports coming out about the abuse and I just think that the more people that talk out about their abuse the better and then the services can look at how to help the abused so it is a good thing. – Participant Two

The most important thing in society is to get people talking. – Participant Six

Controversy in the media regarding current abuse cases highlights inadequacies of the Irish justice system:

The justice system here is ridiculous. – Participant Two

So if something comes up, it hits the media, it becomes a political ball and then it falls back to who's responsible and I think we have to get away from that culture and I think we need to be more systematic. – Participant Five

I can't say that we have grown into a society that's out in place, punitive efforts in relation to child sexual abuse and rape and sexual assault. So whilst we've grown as a society and become ok of hearing a child em we don't necessarily follow through with jail sentences and punishments to people who have abused children, so that they don't match. – Participant Four

The media continues to reveal cases of abuse regularly. Cases such as the Roscommon Incest case have been challenged against the state. Principal social worker and other participants articulate on this issue:

Whereas a lot of those enquiries have changed some of the policies and practices, they have been very minimal one, significant pieces but minimal ones. So it leads to the public grounds and political parties been involved and all them ranglings but ultimately it hasn't led to enough change ya know – Participant Seven

I would say in the last twenty years the general public are absolutely sick the amount of media coverage that child abuse in Ireland has received not just child sexual abuse but that's just one part of it. – Participant Four

It's shocking the amount of reports coming out about the abuse and I just think that the more people that talk out about their abuse the better and then the services can look at how to help those abused so it is a good thing. – Participant Two

It takes something huge to be blown open in court ya know for it to concentrate people's mind to say oh Jesus we have a problem here – Participant Seven

3.5 Psychodynamics of CSA

The psychodynamics of a child that has been sexually abused is evident throughout the analysis. Psychotherapist identifies the trauma of the abuse on the child and tries to re-establish their personal sense of self:

I just want to help the child and their family to work through the ordeal of the abuse and assist their emotions „cause our primary care is the child's mental health. Sometimes I see that the intensity of the abuse can knock the child's level of maturity and have cognitive distortions and feel a sense of who am I. It causes a lot of confusion for kids. – Participant Nine

3.5.1 Speaking Out

The researcher addressed the issue of children narrating their abuse during the interview process. Professionals from diverse backgrounds delegated how children are so vulnerable in society that they are naive about the abuse that has taken place:

...I think it's got easier for kids to come forward and say this happened and it wasn't ok and I need to talk to somebody about it. We have grown into this society that has made it easier for children to tell. – Participant Four

Sometimes the child will tell little pieces of stories about the fact they have told their parent something like “I don't want to go with Johnny, he's mean”. And they feel that

they have conveyed something but really they haven't conveyed specifically what's happened so they feel let down and ya know...that's the child's language and their understanding that they have communicated something might anything at all. – Participant Seven

Sometimes it's just not possible and they disclose it to a neighbour or an aunt. And sometimes that can be a struggle for parents because the parents would say I'm not an abusive parent why wouldn't my child come and talk to me. But in fact it's more due to the dynamics of the child of how the child makes sense of the bad experience – Participant Seven

3.5.2 Self Blame

Self-blame is a huge element of sexual abuse for children. Children cannot comprehend the abuse that has happened and feel it is their fault for what has taken place. It is not uncommon for professionals to perceive children express self-blame:

Em the children sometimes and often feel it's their fault; that they done something wrong and also don't want to get the abuser into trouble. – Participant Nine

There's a huge amount of cases that we deal with where children, for whatever reason, haven't been able to say what they've needed to say and sometimes there in the most supportive and loving families, the child might just not be able to say what has been happening to them maybe it's „cause of the nature of the way they have been violated and it's a breach of boundaries of trust and sometimes they feel they can't process the information and they can't articulate it to the loved one. – Participant Seven

3.5.3 Protecting others from the abuse

Children are sensitive to the abuse. Children subconsciously understand that abuse should not be happening to them. Due to fear and the dynamics of children, children tend to attempt to provide an element of protection for their abuser when the abuse is addressed:

Children very rarely lie about sexual abuse. They would actually tend to more minimise their experiences. It's our experience that children tend to minimise their experience so as not to get the adult perpetrator into trouble. Because they would have formed a relationship with that person – Participant Four

The abuse is secretive and the abuser would be manipulative and that's why children don't really tell people ,cause they think it's their fault or they done something wrong for something bad to happen to them. And they think they would be annoyed, annoy their mam or upset their mam so they don't tell them. – Participant Ten

3.5.4 Threats

A threat from the adult perpetrator to the child was commonly mentioned during interviews:

As much as the child doesn't want the physical abuse that is happening to them, it's a scary notion for a child that their dad might leave the house or their brother might leave the house and other threats we have seen is I'll kill ya. Em ya know so children don't tell for all those reasons. It's really power and that sort of activity can really mess with a child's emotional and mental health. – Participant Seven

...they could have been part of the manipulative abuse like threats "if you tell your mum you'll get kicked out of the house". – Participant Seven

A second element that follows a threat is the coaching mechanism. A child is coached by the perpetrator of the abuse regarding what to say and what not to say to people, particularly professionals:

If a child has been coached you can spot it straight away. You can see it straight off that this child was told what to say. – Participant Six

This statement can correspond with current literature of the SAVI report regarding the low levels of disclosure of abuse to professionals. If children are approached by a professional and questioned about possible abuse occurring in their family home, children are going to narrate what they have been told to say by their abuser. This may be due to an adult authority figure, fear or compassion for the abuser and the relationship.

Discussion

Analysis gathered support the designed research question. The researcher sought to gain an insight into the area of child protection in Ireland. Exploratory questions allowed for an individualistic outlook on the child protection services in Ireland. Participants revealed personal characteristics working with sexually abused children. A multi-dimensional analysis revealed a true consensus of the services available for victims of sexual abuse. Analysis emphasized themes that coincide with gathered literature.

4.1 Research Findings

Sexually abused children are treated as sexual objects. Relationships formed between children and their abuser was substantial to the researcher. On reflection of literature, the formation of a relationship can be linked to Bowlby's psychological attachment theory. Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, p.201) outlines that when children experience fear they seek comfort from a trusted campaign. Typically a trusted campaign is an adult authority figure that hypothetically provides care and protection for that child whether it is a mother, father, brother, sister, aunty or uncle. This subsequently generates confusion for the child when their trusted campaign is their abuser (Howe, 1995, p. 53). The understanding of Bowlby's attachment theory and the confusion of abuse by a caregiver generates perplexity for the researcher.

An interesting find was that children tend to minimise their experiences of abuse to protect their abuser. The researcher understood children blame themselves for abuse that occurs due to intense research of the SAVI report. Thus the researcher could not comprehend how the child becomes the protector of the perpetrator. The CARI annual report (2011, p.7) portrayed this could be in relation to the traumatic experience of the interfamilial abuse. This draws from the psychodynamics of children. The psychodynamics of children focuses on their sense of self, relationships and experiences. Theorist Sigmund Freud stresses the importance the first five years of a person's life is crucial to the formation of an adults personality. Cheal (2002, p.81) concurs with Freud's theory, stated in the background literature, as he submits incest is proven to have a high impact on an individual's psychological development, but the extent of the abuse shaping our emotional wellbeing into adulthood is unknown. Children's neurological responses to sexual abuse will challenge

children with their ability of future attachment, emotional and memory configuration which furthermore causes interpersonal inadequacies (Lovett, 2007, p.584).

Participants involved had immediate diverse reactions and explanations for indicators of CSA. It was distinguished by hierarchal positions in the area of CSA such as social workers, psychotherapists and counsellors indicated a primary indicator to be an utterance made by a child. Whilst this emerges to be an obvious indicator, this contradicts the findings of the SAVI report (2002). The SAVI report (McGee et al., 2002) indicated in the literature, the lack of disclosure of abuse to professionals. It was the researcher's findings that care workers on the ground such as youth workers and special needs assistants which appeared to have most knowledge about secondary characteristic indicators, such as behaviour and development as indicators of CSA. Traumatizing experiences would evidently transform ones behaviour, language and expressions towards others. Care workers initially identify the children's change in behaviours and focus on possible causes.

Training is core to this issue. Training is a huge aspect of achieving upwards mobility in an organisation. Apparent from analysis, superior child protection organisations receive vast amount of training and education. Principal social worker participant couldn't speak any more highly about the sexual abuse orientated organisation he works for. He explicated how the entire personnel would have previous training in child protection and furthermore trained in the organisation to a specific standard and that all staff endures to attain training in order to rejuvenate and update their skills in the area. Unfortunately not all services are adequately trained.

Seemingly organisations on the ground such as youth services, schools and child care facilities do not receive a high level of training in the area of child protection. Some of the lower hierarchical occupants expressed that they had completed a child protection course in their own free time, which was not enforced for all staff to partake. Furthermore participants expressed their apprehension towards child protection course's not obligatory to repeat. Subordinate positions passionately articulated the deficiency of training resulting in an inadequate service for children. On the contrary Children First (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, p.5) highlight the importance for all personnel working directly and indirectly with children to be adequately trained to a high standard in all organisations. It is clear from the data composed that subordinate hierarchical positions in organisations receive

less training than those that occupy high occupational positions in the area of child protection.

The interviews also generated a theme comprising the role of the media. Nestor (2004, p.33) indicates that child sexual abuse has been particularly highlighted in the Irish public domain in the last two decades through the distribution of mass media. The mass media in Ireland focuses on transmitting information into society. The media is responsible for highlighting social issues and furthermore attacks our subconscious thinking. The media raises issues and brings them into the public arena for public debate. Child sexual abuse has been apparent in media coverage over the past decade in Ireland. Professionals outline how the media has made society aware of the evident social problem. It is stressed that the media take a salacious approach to child sexual abuse. The media focuses on vivid degrading headlines that focus on the immoral paedophiles and corrupt individuals that done wrong, rather than highlighting societies responsibility to protect children. Society has a mandatory requirement to report any suspected cases of abuse. The literature cited Protection of Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 (Irish Statute Book), protects people reporting suspected cases of child. Under the proposed legislation of the Children First Bill (2011), if you fail to report a case of child abuse or neglect that should have been reported, you could be liable for conviction to a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both (Children First Bill, 2012, p. 13).

The media furthermore generates perceptions of the Irish state. Participants were satisfied the children's referendum was passed in November 2012. A minority of the samples made reference to our minister Frances Fitzgerald for driving the children's referendum through. On a negative characteristic professionals that directly communicate with the State court's system on a regular basis were outraged by the expectations of the state. Garda sergeant voiced his concerns for wasting professional's time in court procedures. The court's procedures previously required a member of the Gardaí to delegate professional's thoughts and evaluations in relation to case studies. Currently all professionals must attend court and recite their own evidence in relation to cases. This represents all professionals, including social workers, teachers, counsellors, doctors and other service professionals spend the day in court whilst waiting to read evidence. This additionally causes the state expenditures in taxes to replace those professionals who are attending a hearing in the Irish courts.

Frustration expressed by society considers that Ireland does not provide sufficient care for children is logical. As previous highlighted in the literature, Kilkelly (2008, pg.288) indicates child protection is categorised by prioritising in Ireland. This is due to the lack and inaccessibility of social workers. National Strategy plan (2010) emphasizes an increasing proportion of Irish society continue to experience forms of sexual abuse. Realistically social workers are unable to respond to thousands of cases of abuse. As literature highlighted, fifteen million euro was provided to the HSE following the submerging clerical abuse (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009). Financial assistance was made to the HSE to generate additional recruitment of social workers to effectively address the abuse scandal. Analysis provided evidence that additional social workers have made little or no improvements to those frustrated requiring attention by a social worker professional.

4.2 Limitations

On reflection of this research project the researcher could distinguish flaws that could have inhibited the findings of this research project. Due to the small broad sample size this research project is not comprehensive but rather personal and intimate surrounding the social issue. It is consequently unethical to generalise these findings as a sample of all professionals in the area of child protection.

The researcher found one participant to have minimal understanding of child sexual abuse. In hindsight the researcher would have liked to conduct another interview in place of that analysis however due to time framework restrictions this was not possible. Another aspect was the availability of current Irish literature on the state services available for sexually abused children. The researcher found vast quantity of Irish literature on Child sexual abuse but minimal literature of internal exploration of services provided. In stating this, the researcher was satisfied with their findings on the Irish state services available for victims of child sexual abuse.

4.3 Conclusion and Future Recommendations

Research gathered revealed inadequacies of current child protection services in Ireland. It was beneficial to use both genders from a variety of ages and socio economic backgrounds as

it provided this project with a universal sample of professionals involved in child protection in Ireland. Previous researches conducted on child protection services in Ireland minimally outline the services rather than in-depth investigation into the initial personnel that create the organisations for child protection that need further research. The researcher felt state services need further investigation, predominantly into personnel child protection training, due to the emergent concern of CSA. Evidently Children First needs to be made regulation rather than guidelines as to generate improvements in services.

The researcher found this project interesting to conduct. This project generated aspirations for future career in the area of child protection in Ireland. Finally this research project concludes that Irish state services are failing to protect children from sexual abuse due to interagency inadequacies in personnel child protection training.

Appendix One

Consent form:



Child Sexual Abuse in Ireland

My name is name*. I am conducting a research to understand if current state services are adequate enough to protect children from sexual abuse in Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study. Your participation involves an interview that will take roughly forty minutes to conduct.

Your participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any questions raise difficult feelings at any stage during the interview process, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential both personal and the organisation/service identification will be kept confidential. The researcher will replace all original names with pseudonyms. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview and all associated documentation will be handled with the upmost strict anonymity and confidentiality, securely stored on a password protected computer. The information received will not be fabricated or falsely presented to sway or mislead readers of this research.

Should you require additional information about the research, please contact student name* and student supervisors name* and email contact information.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in your decision to participate in this research study.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Two

Interview Process:

The Professional Journey

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself, what your area of practice involves and the reasons you chose to go into this field of child protection?

Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

2. In your professional opinion, what are the most noticeable indicators that a child may be possibly be experiencing sexual abuse?

Psychodynamics

3. Has a child that you have worked with ever mentioned that they have previously told an adult about the sexual abuse occurring and the adult didn't address the abuse?

Media

4. Research (Nestor, 2004) has noted that child sexual abuse has been significantly highlighted in the past two decades in Ireland.
 - Do you think this is due to an increase of public awareness due to the effectiveness of the media?

The Irish State

5. *Under the Child Care Act 1991, the HSE has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection in Ireland.*
 - What is your interpretation of this quote?

6. Organisations in Ireland are required to provide adequate training for those that work directly with children and those that have access to children within an organisation, this is with the guidance and standards of the HSE under the „Safe Guarding Guidance for Organisations’ (Children First Bill, 2012, p.5).
 - To your knowledge is all staff adequately trained to deal with suspected and actual cases of child sexual abuse?
 - Could all staff recognise signs of sexual abuse?

7. As an organisation that works with children of suspected/actual cases of child sexual abuse, do you feel the current policies and procedures, of the Irish state, allow you to deal with the case adequately?
 - Have you had an experience where you felt that the current state policies were not effective enough to take the case further?
 - Do you believe there are any flaws in the Irish state protection system?

8. *Irish law is clear about the importance to maintain contact between parents and children. An emergency care order is a last resort where there is „harsh interference’ within families, and parents are denied access to their children in care (Kilkelly, 2008, p. 293).*
 - However if a child is being sexually abused in their family home should that accused person not be removed automatically until the case is investigated?

9. *Kilkelly (2008, pg.288) indicates that child protection is categorised in Ireland.*
 - Do you agree with this statement?

10. In 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) figures show that there were 6,188 of child abuse reported, 60% of those (3,557) had yet to be resolved in 2006 (Childlinks, 2006, p.9). Recent research of the HSE discovered that the cases of child abuse have continued to increase from 2007-2010 in Ireland (HSE, 2012, p.39).

In 2010, 14,381 cases of child abuse were reported; there were 1,556 cases of confirmed child abuse. Whilst there were 12,825 child abuse cases reported and received but not investigated (HSE, 2012, p.41).

However the HSE (2012, p.80) believe this is mainly *due to the current financial constraints* of the country.

- What are your feelings about the above statistics?

11. According to the SAVI report (2002, p.38) *„Disclosure of sexual violence to professionals was strikingly low’*. The SAVI reports also highlights the increase in the number of people that are experiencing unwanted sexual contacted by predators, particularly in their family home.

- Does this not somewhat put a red flag for Government bodies to introduce more social workers that can effectively deal with the unfortunate increase of child sexual abuse in Ireland?

12. *The Roscommon Case of Incest* – through research I discovered that it took six years for the HSE to recognise the extent of abuse the children of the Roscommon case were experiencing in their family home. Vital information that was key signs that abuse was possibly taken place was not noted by the social workers, such as the issues of a child’s speech and language difficulties (Roscommon Child Care Case, 2010, p.27).

- Do you think it took cases such as the Roscommon incest case for the state to realise the gaps in the child welfare and protection system and to somewhat *learn* from the circumstances?

13. According to the Children First Bill (Children First Bill, 2012, p.12), failing to work together is failing to protect children.

- Do you find that there is a lack of interagency communication within some organisations that may result in the overlooking of vital signs that could indicate a form of child abuse is taken place?

14. In November 2012 we saw changes made in the constitution to protect the rights of children in Ireland. Article 42A recognises that children have rights and the law will now recognise and protect their rights as children, as individuals.

- Do you think that the change in the Irish Constitution will help improve the lives of children in Ireland?

15. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs promote themselves as fully committed to protection of children and young citizens of Ireland in which they work with. The Child Protection Policy and Code of Behaviour for working with children/young people aims to create a balance between protecting the child/children along with respecting their rights and needs as individuals within society. The prevention, detection and protection of children from cases of child abuse requires a multidisciplinary approach from all services that work with children, along with effective management and correct training procedures for all personnel working with children.

- Have you seen the implementation of multidisciplinary approach in all services that work with children and young people?

Additional Questions

16. When will Children First Guidelines be made into law or has it been made law already?

17. Separate Child Protection Department - Do you think a new department that caters to Child Protection will be more effective in dealing with the mass amount of child abuse cases each year in Ireland?

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