

Exploring Parenthood amongst Child Sexual Abuse Survivors

Karen Quintano

Institute of Family Therapy (Malta)

September 2021

Supervisor: Ms Karen Bishop

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Systemic Family
Therapy**

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work in this dissertation titled 'Exploring Parenthood amongst Child Sexual Abuse Survivors' in partial fulfilment of the Master in Systemic Family Psychotherapy, was carried out by myself. Appropriate citation has been included when referring to studies by other authors.

Karen Quintano

532491 (M)

Abstract

This research drew on the experiences of individuals who experienced childhood sexual abuse and are now parents. The aim of the research is to have a better understanding of how their adverse childhood experiences impinged on their parenting, whether becoming a parent changed their world view, and how the individuals have lived this experience in relation to significant others. The review of the literature gave a wider context of the work done in this regard, highlights the theoretical perspectives and understandings on parenting after experiencing childhood sexual abuse. Participants who are currently adult parents and have disclosed their adverse childhood experience years ago were asked to participate. Utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), three individuals were interviewed to study their lived experience as fathers within their families. Results yielded the following superordinate themes; personal journey as a transformative experience, self-care as a way of seeking relief and healing, experience of abuse as pervasive in all aspects of life, deep set ambivalence about the perpetrator, experience of abuse as pervasive in intimate relationships and reparative scrips and incorporating new meanings. Discussion of results emphasises how the experience was found not to be limited to the individual as a parent, but to the entire family system leading to recommendations for supporting the family system, thus exploring shame, stigma and secret keeping, managing parental roles, meaning sense of meanings, resilience and the intergenerational perspective.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, parenting, systemic, coping, pervasive, new meanings

Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost thank Ms. Karen Bishop for her constructive feedback, attention to detail, enriching insights, and time. No words can explain my gratitude for your support. I would like to also express my gratitude to Ms. Karen Bishop, Dr. Charlie Azzopardi and Ms. Carmen Delicata for encouraging and making it possible for me to pursue this course. Additionally, my training colleagues' support has been invaluable, and your friendships will always be treasured. I would like to express my gratitude to the participants who agreed to share their experiences and make this study possible.

Thank you to my family who have always pushed, believed, and supported me in all aspects of my life, including my studies. My gratitude goes to my friends who have always been very compassionate and understanding, while special thanks goes to my dear friend Rebecca who made sure to proofread my work.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my husband, Augusto, who has always relentlessly believed, encouraged, loved, and supported me. Thank you for bearing with me throughout the years to make it possible to achieve my dreams. You have been my rock and I cannot imagine being on this wonderful journey without you by my side.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>10</i>
Aim of the Research	10
Rationale for the research	10
European Context	11
Maltese Context.....	12
Conceptual Framework	13
Structure of the Study	13
<i>Literature review.....</i>	<i>15</i>
Definition.....	15
Local Context	15
Global Context	16
Disclosure	16
Abuse perpetrated by the clergy	18
Child sexual abuse.....	18
Environmental factors.....	18
Developmental Traumatology	19
Different types of sexual abuse.....	20
CSA – a wider context.....	21
Adult Individuals	21
Parenting.....	22
Siblings of a CSA survivor	23
Intimate relationships	24

Moving Forward	24
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>27</i>
Research Design	27
Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA	27
Design	28
Sample Recruitment.....	28
Inclusion and exclusion criteria	29
Benefits and risks	29
Data collection	30
Ethical considerations	30
Participants	31
Data Analysis and Participation	31
Self-Reflexivity	32
<i>Results</i>	<i>34</i>
Overview of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes.....	34
Theme 1: Personal Journey as a transformative experience.....	35
Managing the experience as a multistage process	35
Pain as a transformative experience.....	38
Renegotiating masculinity & sexual orientation	39
Theme 2: Self-care as a way of seeking relief and healing.	40
Sports as a method of seeking relief	41
Spirituality as a means of seeking relief and healing	42
Theme 3: Experience of abuse as pervasive in all aspects of life	43
Education as a lost opportunity	44

Shared cultural meaning where experiencing abuse means becoming an abuser	45
Theme 4: Deep set ambivalence about the perpetrator	46
Looking up to the perpetrator as a father figure	46
Anger at the perpetrator.....	47
Theme 5: Experience of abuse as pervasive in intimate relationships	48
Difficulties in negotiating closeness and distance.....	48
Spousal relationship in co-parenting	51
Hypervigilance as a form of protection.....	52
Difficulties in sexual relationships.....	55
Theme 6: Reparative scripts and incorporating new meanings	56
Gratitude in becoming a parent.....	56
Gratitude in being able to love	57
Parenting as a form of redemption.....	57
Breaking the silence and shifting to advocacy	59
Conclusion	63
<i>Discussion</i>	<i>65</i>
Systemic understanding of results.....	65
Shame, stigma, and secret keeping.....	65
Managing parental roles	67
Meaning making.....	67
Resilience	69
Intergenerational Perspective.....	69
Recommendations for services.....	70
Self-Reflexivity	71
Possible effects on the researcher	71
Self-reflexivity on a personal level	71

Making Connections to my colleague’s systemic research	72
<i>Conclusion</i>	75
Recommendations for future research	75
Research Limitations	76
Concluding thoughts	76
<i>References</i>	78
<i>Appendix</i>	89

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a global concern, with numerous studies citing a wide range of adverse outcomes in adolescence and consequently adulthood (Barrett, 2009; Barrett, 2010; Allbaugh et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2014).

However, what happens when these individuals become parents and now must care for their own? How is their experience factored in when fostering a new healthy upbringing for their young?

This dissertation focuses on the experience of navigating parenthood amongst child sexual abuse survivors. For this dissertation CSA will also be used to denote childhood sexual abuse.

Aim of the Research

The aim of this dissertation is to research the lived experience of parents who have been sexually abused as minors on a local context. This will help to bring forward how they believe this has impacted their parenting. Additionally, it will aim to provide professionals, educators, and other interested individuals an insight into the survivors' experience as parents based on our local context.

I would like to gain an understanding of how they approached their roles as parents and how they managed to co-parent with the other biological parent of their child/children, to see how they positioned themselves while relating to the family.

Rationale for the research

When one of our supervisors at IFT-Malta mentioned survivors of childhood sexual abuse during a lecture, I was intrigued about the different roles these individuals would have in life. I found

myself reflecting on how these children would grow up and venture into the world, most notably how that experience would impact them if they would become parents.

My identity as an educator and as a trainee psychotherapist means that I work very closely with various families, including adolescents' families on a day-to-day basis. The school where I have worked for the past years has always sought to keep a close relationship with the students' family. Hence, the parents' perspective was always something of great interest to me even before I started this Masters course, which has further helped me to see a new world in my old world as I get to observe the entire system with a fresh pair of eyes.

The consensus is that all educators and parents must work towards providing the best environment for the child, and although there is no one right route, our inputs (parents, educators and other adults involved) are greatly affected by our experiences and how we interpret the world around us. Behind every child, there is a family where the parents' past experiences help shape the children's upbringing.

Therefore, throughout this dissertation I will delve into the experience of various parents and how their CSA experience influences their parenting.

European Context

Various entities around the world strive towards eradicating child exploitation, such as ECPAT who globally work towards ending sexual exploitation in children across all systems, whether that entails prostitution, trafficking, early and forced marriages (ECPAT International, 2021) and UNICEF who globally work towards child protection and child survival amongst other valuable areas (UNICEF, 2018).

Working towards the protection of children, the Council of Europe Convention works to oppose sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. This was established in Lanzarote and hence mostly referred to as the Lanzarote Convention. The Lanzarote Convention works to initiate a general standard for the protection of children's rights in all European countries (INHOPE, 2022). The Lanzarote Convention has raised awareness on many aspects on child sexual abuse, one of which is

the discussion in raising awareness on sexual abuse of children within the circle of trust (Council of Europe, 2018). People within the circle of trust are those individuals who are trusted by the child and hold a position of certain authority or is an influential person in the child's life (Childhub, 2021)

Maltese Context

Malta's population density is 1380 individuals per km², a figure which is increasing drastically with every passing year ("Malta population (2021)," n.d.), thus managing intimacy and privacy has always been difficult in Malta, even before the digital age took over. Sultana & Baldacchino (1994) describe how intimacy is affected due to this environment. They describe how knowledge which is otherwise seen as private, is swiftly obtained and rapidly passed on as an exchange of information, or what is colloquially known as gossip. This is essential when considering disclosure, public or otherwise. This topic has been considered as a taboo topic not just in Malta but also abroad (Peter, 2008, Yates, 2016 and Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, 2019).

Moving back to the local context, Tener & Murphy (2014) describe how difficult it is for adult disclosures to happen when the perpetrators were family members, as the survivors are afraid of endangering their relationships with other members of the family. Given Malta's local context, where relationships are functionally diffused (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994), even if the perpetrator is not a family member, there is a higher chance of them being in the child's social circle since the same individuals are brought into contact frequently, given the circumstances. The general narratives and scripts are to "get along, whether they like it or not, knowing that they are likely to renew and reinforce relationships with the same persons in a variety of settings over the course of a whole life span" (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994, p. 17). The Maltese context makes it even more difficult to come forward with such personal information as it is not only the self who is affected, but the entire family.

Conceptual Framework

This research will take a systemic stance by focusing on how the individual's childhood experience features into the perceptions of various members of the family in the wider contexts, most especially in their role as parents. As a systemic researcher, this study will be focused on the survivor's experience of parenting - how they think their parenting has been impacted, how they believe their spouse experiences co-parenting with them, and how they believe their children experience them as parents. Apart from the systemic perspective, I will take a social constructive stance since;

"... Social constructionist ideas emerge from a process of dialogue, a dialogue that is on-going, and to which anyone – even you as reader – may contribute. As a result, however, there is no one, authoritative account that represents all the participants. There are many different views, and some tensions among them." (Gergen, 2009, p.4)

These two frameworks both emphasise the importance of relationships (Dallos & Draper, 2015) and hence they were seen as the ideal basis for this research. More detail about Malta's local context in relation to child sexual abuse will be discussed in the section Local Context.

Structure of the Study

In this introductory chapter I have discussed the aims of the research, my rationale for my interest in this research, how the Maltese context views information (gossip) as well as discussing how the systemic perspective and social constructive stance feature in achieving this study's aims.

The next chapter will provide a more in-depth view of relevant literature, followed by the methodology and research design of this dissertation. The findings of this research will be presented together with a detailed discussion

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review

Definition

Child sexual abuse (denoted as CSA) is defined as any sexual activity executed against a minor by threat, force, pressure, or manoeuvring (Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018). The range of sexual activities includes fondling, asking a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, engaging a child in prostitution or pornography, or online child luring by predators (Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018). Similarly, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines child maltreatment as the

“abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (World Health Organisation, 2020, para. 1).

Local Context

Awareness in many local departments has increased during the past decade ranging from Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), Education sector, Cyber Crime Unit, Health sector and the Church to name a few.

Thirty calls were made to Appogg in 2019 where the presenting problem was child sexual abuse. An editorial by the Times of Malta cites that police figures in 2019 show that there is one child per week who is sexually abused (Times of Malta, 2020). The male to female ratio was 1:5 however, this was only true for disclosed cases and the true figures might differ (Attard Montalto & Mangion, 2007).

Malta had also been shocked by the story of two priests who abused boys in their care at Dar San Ġużepp (Independent, 2012). The headlines continue to be updated as more people are coming forward. Recent stories include a Gozitan case where the Gozitan Bishop, Anton Teuma is testifying against the accused (Xuereb & Borg, 2021). Abuse by the clergy will be discussed in section Abuse perpetrated by the clergy in more detail.

Global Context

Many bodies around the world have recognised the need in working systemically within societies to eradicate child abuse. ECPAT, founded in 1990 works globally with organisations to support the eradication of child abuse by focusing on research to be able to take necessary actions (ECPAT International, 2021). UNICEF's work during 2021 is summarised by the following; four million and four hundred thousand children were at the receiving end of violence were provided with the needed health, justice or social work services, seven million and six hundred thousand adolescent females received interventions against child marriages, ten million and two hundred thousand people were engaged through several platforms promoting the eradication of female genital mutilation, twelve million people were given the needed mental health support and thirteen million and nine hundred thousand females and children were provided with risk mitigation, response or prevention programmes against gender based violence (UNICEF, 2022, p. 4).

Disclosure

Disclosure is an important aspect when discussing CSA especially in Malta, because for many years the topic has been treated as an unspoken evil. In a recent report, numerous weaknesses were reported in Malta's response to disclosure. Individuals are asked to visit several services and/or re-live their trauma by retelling it in front of various professionals, ultimately leading to (in most cases) secondary victimisation (GREVIO, 2020). Hence this section will discuss disclosure in more depth to better understand the implications behind disclosure or lack of it.

Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner (2016) write how secrecy is the pivotal basis of sexual abuse - where many abusers suggest that the other party will be blamed (thus making them believe they seduced their abusers), removed from their homes and placed in an orphanage, or have their family threatened.

Deering & Mellor (2011) asked respondents to state reasons for not disclosing abuse when the perpetrators were female. The reasons included being afraid to disclose the abuse, being made to believe the abuse was their fault, feeling threatened, not being aware at the time that the actions were abusive, and feeling confused and / or ashamed which left them unable to report, and being bribed with gifts while getting attention from the abuser.

Comparitively, younger children are less likely to disclose than older children, with many years having passed in some cases. Many young people were hesitant to report for fear of upsetting their parents (McElvaney, 2013). When discussing gender, males are found to be more reluctant to disclose.

It is important to understand the dynamics of disclosure, with special focus on the necessities of young people to sustain control over the entire disclosure process, the key role that peers play in disclosure, the reactions of adults in both informal and formal fronts, and the opportunities to tell, is paramount in helping young people speak earlier about their experiences of sexual abuse (McElvaney, 2013). Age, gender and fear of consequences are the main issues governing disclosure.

Finally, in order to aid disclosure, professionals should always ask in a direct open manner. While some may need time to disclose, studies suggest that building the pressure helps to increase disclosure whilst always helping the individual to maintain control over their situation (McElvaney, 2013).

Abuse perpetrated by the clergy

Relating with the previous section about Disclosure, in Malta, the “solid presence of the Catholic Church at the heart of Maltese social life is paralleled spatially by the central, dominant position of the parish church edifice proper, commanding the radial hub of all local towns and villages” (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994, p. 12), making any abuse perpetrated even more difficult because of the high held position the priest has in the Maltese culture.

Doyle (2008) writes how most children exposed were all dedicated members hence the spiritual damage is more severe. Catholic priests have been revered as an extension to God - a person of trust second only to God. A child had been taught from a very young age to trust implicitly and for this reason, when any sexual acts have taken place, it is as if incest has taken place (Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner, 2016). Doyle (2008) explains how the attack on the spirit is not limited to the children. This is also felt by the relationships the children have or form in the future. This list includes everyone who is close to the individuals including parents, spouses, and siblings.

Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner (2016) write that upon evaluating and treating priests, one could, after / during a more in-depth investigation make the following hypotheses: 1) priests who sexualise any minor have shown preference to pubescent or postpubescent boys, not prepubescent boys and girls, 2) many of these priests have been exposed to premature interactions of a sexual nature as minors, 3) the perpetrators most often exhibit social immaturity, and 4) exhibit instabilities in their psychosexual development.

Child sexual abuse

Environmental factors

Recently, society has become more aware of child sexual abuse and significant attention is being paid to the complex mental health issues/manifestations that can follow such an experience

(Briere & Jordan, 2009; Craig & Sprang, 2007; Howe, 2005; Stephenson et al., 2008). There are complexities when it comes to CSA which make it difficult to discern the effects. The environment where CSA tends to take place is one with a high level of stress and lack of organisation. The Centre for Disease Control and Intervention (2021) lists several factors a child's environment might include which increase the chances of CSA. Such factors include:

1. Several individual risk factors such as:
 - a. Frequent breaking of the law,
 - b. Sexual fantasies with coercion,
 - c. Early sexual initiation amongst others.
2. Relationship factors such as:
 - a. Having a family history of violence or conflict,
 - b. Having an emotionally unsupportive family environment,
 - c. Being involved in a violent or abusive intimate relationship amongst others.
3. Community factors such as:
 - a. Poverty,
 - b. Ambivalence towards sexual violence within community,
 - c. Inadequate community sanctions against perpetrators amongst others.
4. Societal factors such as:
 - a. Norms that support women's inferiority and sexual submissiveness,
 - b. Norms that support sexual violence,
 - c. Inadequate reforms and policies with regards to sexual violence.

Developmental Traumatology

Developmental Traumatology focuses on the "systemic investigation of the psychiatric and psychobiological impact of adversity on the developing child" (De Bellis et al., 2011, p. 551). De Bellis et al., (2011) continues to discuss how the brain development is regulated by means of genes which

overwhelmingly interact with life experiences. There is an array of adverse experiences, many of which were discussed in 'Environmental factors' section in this literature review. "Stress exposure affects the neurotransmitter systems, neuroendocrine system, and immune system" (De Bellis et al., 2011, p. 555). It is highly expected that many of the severe and long-lasting symptoms related with child abuse and neglect occur in combination with shifts of these systems.

Different types of sexual abuse

Different types of abuse will lead to different strategies employed by the children and different impacts on the child's mental, physical, and behavioural state. Children who had secure attachments fared much better than those without. CSA can be categorized in three sections (Howe, 2005, pp 208)

- Sexual abuse without physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse with physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse framed by the perpetrator as the expression of love.

Where there is no physical abuse, the children tend to experience fear, shame, confusion, and helplessness. The child tries to maintain a relationship with a non-abusing parent by not speaking about the abuse. Their aim would be to protect the parents (role-reversal) as the child fears the parent will be unable to cope. In some instances, children also "adopt the role and expectations of parents, perhaps becoming sexual partners to the parent or nurturing rather than being nurtured" (Richardson & Bacon, 2001, p46).

When there is physical abuse, or the threat of physical abuse (towards themselves or a loved one), a child would suffer harrowing helplessness. The abuser creates a world where the child would lose their bearing using a mixture of secrecy, denial, and loss of confidence in themselves and others. If abuse and assault happen with no warning, this leaves the child constantly on the alert as they know that nowhere and no time is ever safe for them (Howe, 2005).

Where abuse is systematic or ritualistic, the child is further terrorised by knowing what will come. All this leaves the child with little escape, and they mostly resort to dissociation. If one does not exist, they will not feel the pain.

When the sexual abuse is reframed as an expression of love, children who are sexually abused by reliant, emotionally needy, and frail abusers are presented with a confused version of love and admiration, hurt and fear. Closeness unfortunately would equate to sexual behaviour. Children whose behaviour is sexualized will be rejected by peers, adding another element of developmental risk to that already posed by the sexual abuse itself (Howe, 2005). Bacon & Richardson (2001) stress that whatever the circumstances, people in power are recognising the severe damage being done when abuse is perpetrated by attachment figures.

Dallos & Draper (2005) describe family life as being autonomous in their decisions while at the same time exhibiting recurring, anticipated patterns. Hence one can conclude that one member can affect the whole system. In the following section, I will attempt to look at various stakeholders in the wider system to further emphasise how all members of the family are affected.

CSA – a wider context

Adult Individuals

Impact on adulthood has been well-documented over the years (Dimitrova et al., 2009); (Easton et al., 2010). Deering & Mellor (2011) state how adults who experienced childhood sexual abuse found it hard to trust, and suffered from low self-esteem, isolation, confusion, depression, inability to express emotions, as well as other impacts with sexuality and feelings of self.

The horror of the repercussions of CSA have been documented through narratives. As an example, Etherington's research describes the story of two brothers who had been abused by their grandfather. As adults, the brothers always put other people's needs first. Their neediness was in proportion to the level of abuse suffered. Etherington's client suffered from PTSD as an adult, mostly

suffering from flashbacks where he was plagued with visual, tangible, olfactory commotions taking him back to the heinous event (Etherington & Rogers, 2000).

Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner (2016) discuss the psychological shock experienced by the young person and how their psyche is unable to make sense of what is happening. To cope, their self splits through dissociation. As an adult, much like an army veteran hitting the floor during a thunderstorm “a Roman collar, the scent of incense, light streaming through stained glass at a certain time of day, organ music” (Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner, 2016, p.77) all terrorise the adult survivor. Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner (2016) continues to discuss how the survivor becoming sexually abusive is very rare.

Unfortunately, the adult will fully realise what was ruthlessly stolen from them (Frawley-O'Dea & Goldner, 2016). In general, CSA has been seen to affect the individuals as adults whether in education, relationships and when parenting their own children (De Jong et al., 2015). Looking towards a way forward, a study comparing systemic practices to another showed that the individuals' experiences of therapeutic outcome and quality of life were considerably better in the systemic therapy group (Lau & Kristensen, 2007). Discussing systemically means that the wider context is taken into consideration, since the effects of abuse infiltrate other areas of the survivor's life. This research will focus on one aspect of the survivor's life - parenting.

Parenting

Parenting, in it and of itself is a stressful experience, especially for new parents. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between CSA and parental stress (Hugill et al., 2017; DiLillo & Damashek, 2003).

Wright et al. (2012) researched survivors who became mothers. This research spoke about how the mothers wanted to mother differently and were committed to the work, how they worked towards evaluating their work as mothers, creating awareness of how their lives were impacted by the abuse and worked towards creating new patterns. The mothers also had certain challenges when parenting because they stated they did not have a healthy reference for parenting. Challenges included “demonstrating empathy and affection, disciplining and setting limits, promoting

autonomy, promoting healthy sexuality, and protecting the child.” (Wright et al., 2012, p.543).

Coping methods included investing in building supportive links, knowledge to neutralise negative self-evaluations, and finding time to partake in relaxing and reviving activities.

According to O’Brien et al., (2019), fathers who were sexually abused as young children found themselves to be more hypervigilant especially when it came to their children being out of sight. Another important theme in this interpretative phenomenological study was the opening of wounds which were already present since the participants of the study had blocked off the experience/s to protect themselves at a young age. Having children acted as a catalyst to triggers. Sigurdardottir et al. (2012) found that fathers showed an array of negative consequences in their relationships with their children depending on how they experienced their trauma. Those who felt intense fear found that their children give meaning to their life, those who froze showed symptoms of postpartum depression, and survivors who dissociated experienced problems triggered by emotional disconnection. Fathers who self-blamed had a tendency to over-protect their children, those who felt guilty exhibited problems in trusting their children with others, survivors who experienced shame showed difficulties with proximity and closeness, and survivors who were forced into suppressed silence felt there was prejudice against them with regards to their children.

Martsof & Draucker (2008) discuss survivors and family legacies. When discussing family legacies, survivors who found themselves stuck in a family legacy ended up passing it on to their children, continuing the cycle to the new generation. Those who wanted to end the cycle and pass on a new family legacy did so by making sure their children felt loved and nurtured, and even protected them from the other parent - one participant describes how the father abuses drugs.

Siblings of a CSA survivor

Although the focus of the study remains with parenting, the next two short sections will focus on relationships beyond parenting since this experience has consequences on the entire family. No man is an island and when the survivor is able to speak out, the role of the family and or

future partner will also have a significant impact on the survivor. Siblings' perspectives of CSA yielded information about the impact the CSA has on the family. According to Crabtree et al., (2018) there are five themes which emerged from the IPA study with siblings: trying to make sense of the situation, finding it difficult to provide support, managing the impact on the family, feeling silenced then managing to break free, and finally rescripting the future.

Intimate relationships

When it comes to intimate relationships, sexual abuse forecasts difficulty where concerns of trust and reciprocity must be present if the relationship is to be maintained. The sexually abused child finds it difficult to develop healthy representations of caring and protective relationships, and these difficulties often linger into adulthood (Howe, 2005).

Chauncey (1994) described how partners of CSA survivors felt guilt for having wants and feelings of their own, how they felt a barrier to closeness between them and their partner, found difficulty to show spontaneity or be unpredictable, and experienced issues in sexual relationships. However, despite the hurdles, resilience was demonstrated creating a sense of hope (Crabtree et al., 2018). Resilience and hope can foster a better environment to aid in co-parenting.

Moving Forward

Various studies highlight different attributes which help work towards a resilient narrative. When having clients who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, Deblinger et al., (2001) states that there are more positive outcomes (for the child/adolescent and the parents) when the parents are included in the therapy process compared with interventions that focus exclusively on the survivor thus highlighting the importance of a systemic perspective.

Domhardt et al., (2014) explain how the best shielding factor on an individual level was found to be education. Even positive attributes and feelings towards education was found to

enhance resilience in adolescents and adults alike. Psychoeducation was found to hold an important role in therapy sessions when dealing with CSA survivors, obviously when delivered in the suitable manner. Domhardt et al., (2014) also showed that receiving social support from different sources will act as a safeguard against unfavourable outcomes of CSA.

Fathers who were sexually abused as children state that doing their best at being a good father in turn helps them to heal from their fractured childhood. The study found that searching outwards and seeking help also aided them to cope better and thus look at fatherhood as being a restorative process (O'Brien et al., 2019).

Vilenica et al. (2013) discuss how the participants in their study worked towards healing. Their process involved personal turning points, awareness of their inner world, seeking help from professionals, looking at core beliefs, and making meanings while reconstructing their self. Furthermore, the process involved working through self-disclosure through self-understanding, validation, transformation of self and post-traumatic growth. By the end of the study, both participants reported feeling blessed by everything they had learnt by doing the difficult work necessary to re-emerge to a new level where their trauma, which was previously a tremendous burden, is now altered into growth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

This chapter's aim is to provide a thorough account of the methodological approach deemed appropriate to explore the experience of parenthood amongst child sexual abuse survivors. Additionally, the selected sample, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was seen as the best course of action to be able to delve deep into the participants' experiences of parenting, as it is a good approach to ensure the participants' voices are given prominence and are included (Denny & Weckesser, 2018).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (hereby referred to as IPA), was seen as a better choice because it aims to focus and analyse the participants' attempts to make sense of their own experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Hence the aim is to "reach the experience" (Kacprzak, 2017, p. 4). Another reason for opting to choose IPA is because Pringle et al. (2011) discuss how a holistic insight can be achieved, thus favouring the individual's experience. Although a smaller sample would be used, a richer, more in-depth account of the participant's experience would be taken, hence achieving the aim of the study - to explore the experience of parenthood amongst childhood sexual survivors. I also deemed IPA as a suitable methodological approach since it has been used in various studies pertaining to child sexual abuse such as (Riley, 2020; Plastock et al., 2021). Their reason for choosing IPA was that it acknowledges the fact that the researcher's experiences can never fully eliminate bias from how the participants make meanings from the phenomena being researched.

Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA

According to Smith et al., (2009) IPA is based on three important theoretical underpinnings namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. Phenomenology concerns itself with the

study of experience, hermeneutics focuses on interpretation while ideography emphasises on the experience which leads us to re-evaluation. IPA is seen often considered idiographic in that the study of a specific experience concentrates on specific individuals which in the case of this research are the adults who experienced childhood sexual abuse and how they deal with specific events - which in this case is their experience as a parent.

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) discuss IPA's complementary commitments which are to give the concerns a voice and to make sense of what the individual brings. IPA recognises that humans strive to make sense of experiences, that is, humans make sense by interpreting the experience. This shows that IPA is informed by the theory of hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). "Interpretations are therefore bounded by both the respondent's capacity to articulate their experiences, and the investigator's ability to dissect them" (Noon, 2018, p. 75).

Design

Sample Recruitment

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, a one-to-one interview was set with the participants to facilitate the interview as a conversation with a purpose. Information pertaining to the research was sent to IFT and participants who were interested in collaborating were invited to contact me. They were given the option of meeting either face-to-face (at a place of their choice) or on Zoom. They all opted to meet face-to-face.

The research was heavily focused on a small sample size; ($n = 3$ for a Masters-level IPA study (Smith et al., 2009)) since it focused on a highly sensitive nature while meeting specific criteria listed (discussed in Inclusion and exclusion criteria) which also decreased the amount of people eligible for this research. Although as a researcher I reached out and invited participants to take part in the research, the sensitive nature of the topic ultimately made it extremely difficult to recruit participants.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Keeping in mind the traumatic aspect of child sexual abuse, the study required the participating parents to be adults, that is over the age of eighteen. Individuals considered for the study would have had time to disclose and process before participating due to the delicate nature of the study. Disclosure could have been made to a professional, police officer or any support group before agreeing to the interviews. Since the study is based on the local context, survivors had to be Maltese residents. Any participants who did not fit in with these criteria were excluded. That being said, the participants willing to take part in this study was fairly low due to the sensitive topic on top of discussing private family matters.

Benefits and risks

Benefits to this research included a deeper understanding of the parental experience on a local context. This deeper understanding will benefit individuals who passed through similar experiences and are thinking of becoming parents or are already parents. This research will also benefit professionals in different sectors who work with individuals who had a past experience of child sexual abuse.

Participants may have felt discomfort in describing how their parenting has been impacted as well as feeling uncomfortable in disclosing personal information to a stranger. In response to these risks, I spent time to explain the entire process - what will happen, how the information will be stored, how the place of the interview will be chosen. They were informed that they can stop the interview at any time, and request to have their information deleted and omitted from the study. They were given important contact details should they feel the need to discuss any resurfaced feelings.

Data collection

Data collection was done via semi-structured interviews with a few open-ended questions to ensure the experience of the participant is given with minimal outside interference from the researcher. While I acknowledge that the interviews were analysed from my perspective, during the interviews I made sure to ask for clarifications when needed to ensure that I conduct a good analysis of their interpretation.

Interviews were voice recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews were carried out in a space of the interviewee's choice. They were given all the necessary paperwork and any questions they had were thoroughly addressed before signing. The interviews were transcribed prior to analysis so that they could be presented together with the researcher's analytic interpretation and supportive excerpts (Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical considerations

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the study, ethical considerations were very thorough. While remedies to counteract risks were described in Benefits and risks, research was being conducted to ensure that researching sensitive topics is done in an honourable manner (Decker et al., 2011; Walls et al., 2010). Ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Family Therapy, Malta. Great lengths were taken to ensure that the research does not impact the interviewees in a negative manner. To safeguard all the participants, extensive research was conducted on studies abroad as to how researchers settled on which inclusion and exclusion criteria to consider, how they interviewed sensitively while gaining the necessary information for the research, and what precautions they took to ensure that the participants were safe even after the interview process. Researching when individuals decide to disclose, what affects disclosure at this stage, ethical considerations and gaps, was of the utmost importance (Nguyen, 2011; Crowther & Lloyd-Williams, 2012; McElvaney, 2013; Radhika et al., 2018).

Participants were given detailed information regarding how the interviews will be taken, stored, and analysed. They were informed of the duration of retention of the information and where the research will be stored and eventually published.

They were given my contact details and my tutor's contact details in case they would like to contact us for further information. It was emphasised that taking part in the research was completely voluntary and they should only take part if they are comfortable doing so. All participants were provided with a participation form and consent form with the necessary details, and they were free to contact IFT-Malta for therapeutic support should they feel the need to do so after the interview.

Participants

Three participants came forward to participate in this study. All participants were male whose ages ranged from 45-55 years of age, and are all parents who are currently present in their children's lives. All the participants experienced childhood sexual abuse during their adolescent phase of life and had disclosed their experience in the previous years, thus making them eligible to partake in this study. The sensitive nature of the research, and the previously mentioned inclusion criteria made it difficult to have a larger sample of participants.

A letter of invitation was sent, and all participants agreed to take part in the study after being given a copy of the participation and consent form in English and Maltese.

Data Analysis and Participation

Smith et al. (2009) presented a process of data analysis which was followed to maintain the phenomenological accuracy of the research. The aim of the research was to focus on prevailing themes that emerged from the experiences of the participants.

Although time consuming, I made sure to transcribe all the interviews myself to be able to analyse the data in the same manner so as to ensure consistency in the results. The transcripts were read multiple times as necessary, and particular sections of the interviews were listened to again to confirm the change in tonality and other non-verbal communication. Notes were taken to analyse the interviews and subsequently used to identify emerging themes.

Self-Reflexivity

Child sexual abuse has been a taboo subject in Malta and upon reflection, I felt that while there was a lot being done in this regard, there was room for improvement. I also noted that local research was very limited, and no research considered the parents' experience within our local context.

I made sure to research extensively the literature published abroad to familiarise myself with any beliefs I might hold. This was done during various points in the research - before interviewing, while transcribing, and while interpreting the data collected. I personally transcribed all the interviews to make sure this process was done objectively. Due to the heaviness of the interviews and the entire research, I found myself connecting to certain feelings of helplessness, sadness, empathy, resilience, and making new meanings.

The results of the interviews will be presented in the next section entitled 'Chapter 4 Results and Findings'.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results

This chapter will present the findings from the interviews conducted with participants who agreed to share their experience of parenting after experiencing CSA. The sample consisted of three male participants, all of whom had disclosed in the years prior to this interview. They are all between 45-55 years of age and are all parents who are currently present in their children's lives. They all experienced CSA during the adolescent years of their life. All the names used in this dissertation are fictitious to protect the participants' identities. As explained in Chapter 3 – Methodology, interviews were analysed using IPA where the themes (both superordinate and subordinate) emerged from the data analysis process.

Overview of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

The table shown below (continued overleaf) shows an overview of the emergent superordinate and respective subordinate themes.

<u>Superordinate Themes</u>	<u>Subordinate Themes</u>
Theme 1: Personal Journey as a transformative experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Managing the experience as a multistage process. b. Pain as a transformative experience. c. Renegotiating masculinity & sexual orientation.
Theme 2: Self-care as a way of seeking relief and healing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sports as a method of seeking relief. b. Spirituality as a means of seeking relief and healing.

<u>Superordinate Themes</u>	<u>Subordinate Themes</u>
Theme 3: Experience of abuse as pervasive in all aspects of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Education as a lost opportunity. b. Shared cultural meaning where experiencing abuse means becoming an abuser.
Theme 4: Deep set ambivalence about the perpetrator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Looking up to the perpetrator as a father figure b. Anger at the perpetrator
Theme 5: Experience of abuse as pervasive in intimate relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Difficulties in negotiating closeness and distance. b. Spousal relationship in co-parenting. c. Hypervigilance as a form of protection. d. Difficulties in sexual relationships.
Theme 6: Reparative scripts and incorporating new meanings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gratitude in becoming a parent. b. Gratitude in being able to love. c. Parenting as a form of redemption. d. Breaking the silence and shifting to advocacy.

Theme 1: Personal Journey as a transformative experience

Managing the experience as a multistage process

Participants explained the process they went through to realise and understand what had happened to them as adolescents. Once they did, they felt they could hypothesise as to what led to the experience.

Bruce: *Imbagħad sirt naf kemm hi gravi is-sitwazzjoni min meta sirt ġenitur għax kelli t-tfal jiena.*

Then I found out how serious the situation is when I became a parent because I had children.

Bruce: *Meta bdejt inrabbi, bdejt nara kemm hu ħazin, sirt aware wara li kelli t-tfal f'idejja.*

When I was raising my children, I saw how horrible it was, I became aware when I held my children in my hands.

Participants reflected on the fact that their abuser took advantage of their deprivation. The fact that the participants arrived at this hypothesis led to the creation of further themes which will be discussed at a later stage.

Bruce: *Xtrawni bl-imħabba biex użaw u ħadu li riedu minni.*

They bought me with love to use me and take what they wanted from me.

Bruce: *Inti jekk trid taqbad qattus biex tieklu, tmur issib qattus min barra u tieklu, mhux ser tmur tħabbat, mhux ser tidħol go villa kollha alarms fhimt, u tisraq qattus. Issib qattus li qiegħed bil-ġuħ tagħmillu tnejn hekk bl-ikel għax taf li bil-ġuħ u jigi. Fhimt? u mingħalih li ġej għal ikel għax inti tħobbu. Filfatt inti jkollok azzjonijiet differenti go moħħok inti għalfajn u min hemmhekk .. fhimt x'qiegħed ngħidlek?*

If you want to catch a cat to eat it, you'll look for a stray. You're not going to knock; you're not going to a villa full of alarms to steal a cat. You find a cat who's hungry because you know it's hungry and it'll come. Understand? It will think it's coming for food because you love him. In fact, you'll have different ideas and from there ... are you understanding?

Clark: *Hu kien wise ħafna, kien jsib l-iktar debboli ... mistħija, qiegħda tifhem? Dik tgħallem ħafna.*

He was very wise, he used to look for the weak, shy, understand? That helps a lot.

Bruce knew this wasn't the life he wanted his children to experience, so he made sure to marry someone who exhibited all the characteristics he wanted his children to experience.

Bruce: *L-għażliet tiegħi dejjem kont nagħmilhom tajbin. Qabel ma żżewigt lill-mara, jekk kelli għaxra oħra, kollha tlaqthom għax indunajt li ma kienux il-persuna li ridt jiena. Fhimt?*

I always made the best choices. Before I got married, if I had ten other women, I left them all because I knew they weren't the person I wanted. Understand?

Barry discusses how certain things cannot be rushed, and that there is a time for everything. Due to CSA, there were repercussions which the participant felt he had to deal with before he could become a father. Barry was able to work to make peace with his past experience, and this helped him in his preparation in becoming a parent. Pain as a transformative experience will be discussed as the next subordinate.

Barry: *Għax kelli depression u hekk, imma qabel kelli t-tfal, meta kont żgħir. Meta kelli xi sbatax-il sena dejjem bl-istonku juggħani, okkupat, presskoni kelli, imma imbagħad toħroġ minnha u tibda tiela t-taraġ.*

Because I had depression, but before I had children, when I was young. When I was about seventeen years of age my stomach used to hurt, I suffered from (blood) pressure, then you heal and move step by step.

Barry: *L-ewwel ssetiljajt jien, kollox eżatt għamilt, anke meta ridt it-tfal jiena, kollox bit-time u għadni hekk s'issa. Nipprova nqassam kollox bl-eżatt għax inkella teħel.*

First, I made sure to settle down, I did everything exactly, even when I wanted children, everything in its own time and I'm still like that. I try to make sure to schedule things exactly otherwise you get stuck.

Pain as a transformative experience

Upon reflection, Clark found that he lives with the pain by reframing its meaning. Here he states how the pain can help him empathise with others who have gone through difficult experiences.

Clark: *Jiena l-Mulej nirringrazzjah. [...] ta' kull persuna li ltqajt f'hajti, anke dawk li weġġawni. Għax issa qiegħed nipprova ngħin lil haddieħor biex ma jgħaddux (mill-istess esperjenza), jew nifhem lil haddieħor min xiex għadda. Nipprova ... għax tikber, b'ċertu weġġhat tikber. Skond kif toħodha għax hawn min baqa' taħtha.*

I thank God. [...] For every person that I've met in my life, even those who hurt me. Because now I am trying to help others not to pass through (the same experience) or I can better understand what others have gone through. I try... because you'll grow, after passing through certain difficulties you grow. Depending on how you look at it, because there are people who never made it through.

Clark reflects how although the wounds remain, the pain need not, thus reframing the pain as a transformative experience.

Clark: *Anke l-weġġha ħadli l-Mulej, [...] għax kieku aqta' kemm nibki hawn, nitkellem hekk, kieku tkellmek il-mara tgħidlek li kif nitkellem fuqha l-ħin kollu nibki. Darba [...] kont qiegħed nitkellem ma' Ġesu', u għedtlu Mulej, inti taf li jiena ħfirt, inti taf il-qalb. Imma l-weġġha kif għadha hemm? [...] issa jien jew smajt vuċi ġo moħħi jew xi ħadd jsejjaħli b'ismi. Qalli, jiena fuq is-salib ħfirtilhom ta' li għamluli imma l-ewwel ħaġa li urejthom lil appostli huma l-pjagi. Tant ieħor int. Ma jistgħux l-pjagi jmorru min ġo fija u minn dakinhar stajt nitkellem ma' kulħadd.*

God took away my pain [...] because otherwise I'd cry here, talking about it, if my wife had to talk she'd say when I'd speak about it, I'd always cry. Once [...] I was talking with Jesus, and I talked with God, I told him you know I've forgiven, you know what's in my heart. How is the pain still there? [...] now I either heard a voice in my head or someone called out my name. He told me, I forgave them for what they did when I was on the cross but the first thing I showed the apostles were my wounds. The same goes for you. My wounds cannot leave me and from that day I was able to talk to everyone.

Renegotiating masculinity & sexual orientation

Clark here describes how the experience made him question his sexual identity.

Clark: *Psikoloġikament mhux m'affetwatnix, għax għamilt żmien, mhux ħa ngħidlek miġbud lejn is-subien, imma forsi kienet qiegħda tħawwadli naħseb naqra moħħi. Per każu nara guvni, ngħid kemm hu gustuż [...] għaddejt min perjodu, naħseb perjodu ta' tgerfix, sa kemm Itqajt mal-mara, imma qatt ma kelli ġibda sesswali lejn is-subien.*

It affected me psychologically, because there was a period of time, you could say where I was, not gravitating towards men, however, it did make me question. For example, I see a man and I comment on how handsome he is [...] I passed through a period, I think a very confusing period, until I met my wife, however I've never been sexually attracted to men.

Confusion in sexual practices was evident when Clark spoke about what it means when the abuser and victim were of a different sex and when they were of the same sex as shown in the following excerpt. The narrative of inviting the abuse was also suggested when Clark went to court.

Clark: Mhux xi ħaga sabiħa tgħaddi minnha, kieku kienet mara forsi differenti, imma raġel ma' raġel mhux tajjeb.

Interviewer: kif taħseb li kienet tkun differenti?

Clark: bis-sess oppost naħseb tiegħu pjaċir iktar naħseb jien

Interviewer: ma nafx għax...

Clark: ... le naf għax mizzewweg, naħseb li għal mara kien jkun iktar ta pjaċir ... darba hekk qaltli l-qorti, 'kont toqod għarwien biex twaqqgħu? Issa qatt ma konna norqdu għarwenin, jew bil pyjama jew bil-ħwejjeg ta' taħt

Clark: It's not a pleasant experience to go through, maybe it would have been different if it was a woman, but an experience between two males is not good.

Interviewer: How do you think it would be different?

Clark: I think it'd be more enjoyable if it was between a man and a woman.

Interviewer: I don't think so because ...

Clark: I know so, because I'm married, I think it's more enjoyable for a woman... that's what the court implied once, 'did you sleep naked to entice him?' Now we never slept naked, it was either with our pyjama or our underwear.

Theme 2: Self-care as a way of seeking relief and healing.

Participants discussed how sports became an integral part of their lives, to be able to be better parents, they had to make sure that they took care of themselves. Participants managed this through sports and spirituality.

Sports as a method of seeking relief

Bruce: *Għax hawn Malta, ifhimni diffiċli biex tiegħu r-raġun. Malli tmiss mal-qorti qiegħed taħli l-ħin, mhux worth it. Mort il-qorti biex nfittex ir-raġun [...] u bqajt l-qorti, u kont qiegħed ninduna illi qiegħed jkolli ċertu rabja [...] imbagħad sibt l-isport. Biddilli ħafna, bħala psikoloġija l-isport jgħinek għal kwalunkwe problema.*

Because here in Malta, understand that it's difficult to find justice. Once you work with the courts, you're wasting your time, it's not worth it. I went to the courts to find justice and I remained there, and I noticed how I was harbouring certain anger [...] then I found sport. It changed me a lot, psychologically a sport helps you in any problem.

Bruce: *Tneħħilek ir-rabja, mhux toqgħod taħseb, u toqgħod tiffissa [...] l-isport ibiddillek hajtek*

It removes the anger, you don't need to think and spiral [...] sports changes your life

Barry: *Jien attiv, immur nigri kuljum, nittrenja l-weights [...] attiv, nipprova nlaħħaq ma' kollox. Jien dejjem ngħidilhom biex jitrenjaw, jien dejjem kuljum nilbes il-flokk u l-qalziet u mmur u ngħidilhom morru u ma jkunux jridu.*

I'm active, I go running every day, lift weights [...] active, I try to manage everything. I always tell (my children) to train, I always put on my shirt and trousers and go (running) and I tell them to train but they don't want to.

Both Barry and Bruce experience sports as stress relieving, so much so that they both attempt to pass this along to their children.

Spirituality as a means of seeking relief and healing

Wanting to seek relief and healing, Clark and Barry discussed how they found refuge in spirituality where they could arrive to a point of forgiveness to help them towards re-building their lives.

Clark: *Tul dan il-proċess, saret bidla f'ħajti, tajt ħajti għal Ġesu', jiġifieri, issa sirt li rrid naħfer.*

Mort l-ħabs narah, jiġifieri għaddew ħafna affarijiet ta' l-għaġeb. Rajt ħafna affarijiet.

During this process, there was a change in my life, I gave my life to Jesus, this means, that now I have to forgive. I went to prison to see him, so that means that a lot of extraordinary things have happened. I saw a lot of things.

Clark: *Mort, għannaqtu miegħi, ħassejt li kien relief għalih.*

I went, hugged him and I felt it was a huge relief for him.

Clark: *Kont nitkellem ħafna mal-Mulej jien, għax lejH kont ndur, ma kelli lil ħadd lejn min ndur. Allura ħajti qisha dejjem kienet spiritwali, filfatt kienu jgħiduli 'int għal qassis!'. Dak it-tip issir thobb, veru, tgħid min fejn ġiet l-imħabba, għax jien qatt ma rajt imħabba. Ġieli nsaqsi min fejn ġiet l-imħabba li għandi lejn il-familja u lejn il-mara? Dejjem ngħid mingħand l-Mulej, għax Hu ħabbni. Heq! Issaqsi ċertu mistoqsijiet, tgħid jien kif inħobb u qatt ma ġejt maħbub mil-bnedmin?*

I used to talk a lot with God, I used to turn to Him, I had no one to turn to. So my life is now very spiritual, in fact, they used to tell me 'you will become a priest!'. You'll love to that degree, truly, where did that love come from, because I never received love. I sometimes ask myself, where did the love I have for my family and wife come from, because I never experienced love. I always say it comes from God, because He loved me. Hmm! You wonder on certain questions, how am I able to love when I've never been loved?

Barry: *Kien jgħidilna għal prayer meetings tiegħu, [...] għax il-ħin kollu nieħu l-pirmli u nipprova u għalxejn. Filgħodu nqum dejjem imdamdam, l-istonku juġġhani u rasi tuġġhani. Għadni nqum ġai mdamdam, għadni nqum! Xi dwejjaaq, għadni nqum, imdamdam. Ma tikkoncentrax, u ġieli rasi nħossha u ġismi ma nħossux. Qas naf li għandi jdejja u saqajja. Ġratli darba, darbtejn, fhimt? Imbagħad kont immur prayer meetings u rajt xi ħadd jfieg min qisu depression, u ma ħassejtix iktar. Ġieli kien jerġa jaqbadni naqa, bdejt nħoss qisni naqa hekk, naħseb tmien snin ilu, ergajt mort għandu. Qalli m'għandek xejn, m'għandek xejn. Kellimni ftit u għaddieli mill-ewwel. Alla jfejkek bil-preżenza tiegħu.*

He used to tell us to go to his prayer meetings [...] because I used to take pills all the time and no matter how hard I try it was all for nothing. I used to wake up in a bad state, my stomach hurting, my head hurting. I just woke up and I'm already in a bad state! How sad, I just woke up, and already in a bad state. You cannot concentrate, and sometimes I feel my head but not my body. I wouldn't know that I have hands and legs. It happened once, twice, understand? Then I used to go to the prayer meetings, and I saw someone heal from something like depression, I didn't feel it anymore. Sometimes I get like that again,, I feel a bit down, I think it was eight years ago and I went to him again. He told me I have nothing, I have nothing. He talked to me for a short while and I felt better instantly. God heals you with his presence.

The previous two sections showed how all participants looked towards outlets to express themselves and help them to maintain the life that they have all worked hard towards. This can also be related to containment.

Theme 3: Experience of abuse as pervasive in all aspects of life

In the following section, participants describe how pervasive the experience was in various aspects of their life. Pervasion in relationships will be discussed in theme 4.

Education as a lost opportunity

In this subordinate theme, participants explain how the abuse impinged on their studying, thus robbing them of career opportunities.

Bruce: Psikoloġikament taffetwak, taffetwak f'kollox, per eżempju, taffetwak fl-iskola, fhimt?

Jien ma kellix... moħħi ma kienx ikun hemm biex nistudja, allura skola xejn, zero.

It affects your psyche, it affects you in everything, for example, it affects your education, understand? I didn't have...my mind couldn't focus on studying, so education-wise, zero.

Bruce: Qatt ma kellix ċans nistudja, ta' erbatax, ħmistax-il sena ħrigt nahdem. Ma kontx tajjeb għal l-iskola u ridt il-futur tiegħi.

I never had the chance to study, I started working at fourteen, fifteen years of age. I wasn't good at school but wanted to make my own future.

Barry: Moħħok ma jkunx sewwa. La jħalluk titgħallem skola, għax inti moħħok jkun fuq affarijiet oħra. Fhimt?

You won't be in the right frame of mind. They won't let you learn because your mind would be elsewhere - on other things. Understand?

Participants who discussed education, spoke on how difficult it was to concentrate on getting an education while they were experiencing CSA. This led to the participants wanting a very different experience for their children.

Barry: Jien ma tgħallimtx għax għaddejt minn ħafna taħwid, ridt it-tfal tiegħi aħjar minni. Dik biss kont inżomm ġo moħħi.

I didn't learn because I passed through a lot of turmoil, I wanted my children to be better than me. That's all I focused on.

Barry also leaves most of the decisions up to his wife because she continued investing in her education and therefore better suited at making certain decisions.

Barry: *Hi mlaħħqa naqa u hekk allura afdajt fiha.*

She's works in a position of authority so I trust in her.

Shared cultural meaning where experiencing abuse means becoming an abuser

Here Bruce discussed how the prejudice that abused means abuser affected his relationship with his children, where he left nothing to chance and avoided all physical contact with his children.

Bruce: *Bdejt jkolli ċertu fear, li jkolli kuntatt mat-tfal*

I used to be afraid, to have any form of contact with my children.

Bruce: *Kont nisma', per eżempju, li hemm tendenza li jabbuża, hemm tendenza li minn daw li jabbużaw mit-tfal, jgħidu li hemm tendenza li għax kienu jiġu abbużati huma.*

I used to hear, for example, that there is a tendency to abuse, there is a tendency that those who abuse children, they say that there is a tendency that they were abused themselves.

Clark and Barry discuss how the abuse is portrayed by the public, further reinforcing the taboo narrative which feeds on shame and fear.

Bruce: *Tismaħha fil-medja, tisma lin-nies 'għax dak kien abbużat!'*

You hear it in the media, you hear people saying, 'because he was abused!'

While Clark did not let the prejudice stop him from being in contact with his children, he speaks of how much it hurts him to hear other people or media outlets speak about these prejudices in the presence of his family. The implication that he could ever hurt his family by inflicting on them the same pain that he had to endure was inexplicable to Clark.

Clark: *Smajt programmi jgħidu x'aktarx min ġie abbużat, ha jabbuża u dik tweggaghni ħafna lili. Dik smajtha u niddejaq ikun hemm it-tfal u l-mara u tisma' dan il-programm tgħid min ġie abbużat, ħa jabbuża għax lanqas hu sew. Kienet tagħmilli ħafna ħsara mat-tfal tiegħi.*

I heard programmes say that most probably those who were abused, will abuse and that hurts me a lot. I heard that and I'm very uncomfortable in the presence of my children and wife and you hear these programmes saying how those who were abused, will abuse because it's not right. It used to create a lot of damage with my children.

Clark: *Nassigurak, li mhux għax tiġi abbużat, ħa tabbuża għax hawn min tisma', perkażu ħafna, anke l-ħabs, jipprova jara... abbuża u jippruvaw jaraw (jekk kienx abbużat) biex is-sentenza teħel inqas, ma nafx.*

I assure you that you won't abuse because you were abused because you'll hear, a lot, even in prison, they try to see ... someone abuses and they try to see whether (he was abused) so he'd serve a shorter sentence, I don't know.

Theme 4: Deep set ambivalence about the perpetrator

Looking up to the perpetrator as a father figure

Here Bruce, Clark, and Barry each discuss the complexities of seeing their respective father figure atoning for crimes that had been committed against them. Bruce describes the internal turmoil he felt after disclosing and having the possibility of sending this person to prison, Clark

describes how he went to visit him and describes him as the person who raised him rather than the person who hurt him while Barry felt conflicted because at the end he felt as though he sent his father to prison.

Bruce: *Rabbieni għax dak għaliya kien father figure. Bejn ridt nitkellem, bejn ridt nagħmel il-ġid, ma kontx naf x'ha nagħmel. Ha nitfgħu l-ħabs, ħa nitfgħu l-ħabs! Bdejt nigennen, għax bdejt ngħid dan rabbieni, għax għamel affarijiet tajbin.*

He raised me, he was a father figure to me. Part of me wanted to talk, part of me wanted to do good, I didn't know what to do. I'm going to send him to jail, I'm going to send him to jail... I was going crazy! Because I said this person raised me... because he did good things.

Clark: *Bdejt ngħidlu, ħa nigi narak [...] qalli 'mela inti mhux [...] għidtlu 'le jien [...] it-tifel li rabbejtni int' u nkiser*

I kept telling him that I'm coming to visit him [...] he said 'aren't you [...] I told him 'no that's not me I'm [...] the boy you raised' and he was embarrassed.

Barry: *Bħal m'għamilli l-ħazin għamilli t-tajjeb u jien kont naħżnu t-tajjeb ukoll, jiġifieri ma hadtx pjaċir għax mar il-ħabs [...] tfajt lil missieri l-ħabs.*

Although he did bad things, he also did good things and I used to appreciate the good as well, so I wasn't glad that he went to prison [...] I sent my father to prison.

Anger at the perpetrator

Years after the abuse had taken place, upon disclosing to a psychiatrist, Bruce was made aware of the seriousness of what happened, and he could be angry about what was taken from him. This helped him to be able to muster up the courage to speak out.

Bruce: *Il-psikjatra ma' l-ewwel ġurnata beda jibki biki. Għedtlu tajjeb, flok qiegħed nibki jien qiegħed tibki inti!... normali? mhux biċ- ċajt. Bid-dmugħ qalli, 'għax aħna importanti li nifhmu u nibku'. Hemm bżonn tibki, ma nafx jien! Mbad waqaf mid-dmugħ u rrealizza 'inti kellek tagħmel affarijiet ta tnax-il sena li jagħmlu l-miżżewġin.' Beda jgħibni inse da imbagħad, il-psikjatra, u bdejt nirrabja iktar ... mort għandu għax kont bejn ħalltejn u ġejt iktar irrabjat għax mbad għabni inse qalli għax inti bdejt tagħmel affarijiet li jagħmlu l-miżżewġin ta tnax-il sena. Trid tmur tarah l-ħabs biex jiskuża ruħu u tmur taħfirlu.*

The psychiatrist cried on the very first day. I told him I should be crying instead of him! Is this normal? I'm not joking. With tears in his eyes, he said it's important that he understands and cries. Does he need to cry, I can't understand. Then the tears stopped, and he realised 'you had to do things at twelve years old that married couples do'. The psychiatrist made me realise this, and I grew angrier... I went to him because I was undecided, and I came back even more furious because he made me realise when he said you did things that married people do at twelve years old. You must go see him in prison so he apologizes to you and you can forgive him.

Theme 5: Experience of abuse as pervasive in intimate relationships

In the following section the participants discuss how the experience has affected multiple relationships in their lives.

Difficulties in negotiating closeness and distance

Bruce: *Qatt ma ħsilthom, qatt ma lgħabt ċertu logħob magħhom. L-mara tgħidli 'qatt ma ħsilt lit-tfal, qatt m'għamilt hekk, qatt m'għamilt hekk'. Mhux tara, imma fil-verita hemm raġuni għalxiex.*

I never washed them, I never played certain games with them. My wife tells me ‘You never washed the children, you never did that, you never did that’. She cannot see, but in reality, there is a reason why.

Here Bruce acknowledges that the experience has made him keep a certain distance from his children and while his wife didn’t always understand why, he always knew the reason he kept his family at arm’s length. This has had repercussions on his relationships with his children as he discusses:

Bruce: *Dejjem qgħadt il-bogħod magħha [...] dejjem sabet lil ommha, allura jien niġi qisni, jien naf, step-father, jew xi haġa hekk nimmagina.*

I always kept my distance from her [...] she always found her mother, so I would be like, I don’t know, her step-father, or something to that effect.

Bruce: *Ġieli nikkoreġiha u tgħidli ‘lilek nobgħodok’, fhimt? [...] Hi fuq tagħha, allura nipprova nżomm id-dixxiplina [...] issa forsi jew ġejja mill-iskola, jew ġejja għax qatt ma konna close, fhimt? Jista’ jkun fuq hekk.*

Sometimes I used to discipline her and she’d tell me ‘I hate you’, understand? [...] She’s feisty, so I try to keep her disciplined [...] now maybe this (attitude) is coming from school, or because we were never close, understand? It may be because of that.

Clark: *Anke play school kont immur magħha, [...] Darba ġġilidt mat-teacher, għax tant kont, mhux possessive li ma jistgħu jagħmlu xejn, imma kont għassa tagħhom hafna.*

I also used to go to the playschool with her, [...] Once I had an argument with the teacher, because I was so, not possessive that they cannot do anything, but I was always on the alert.

On the contrary, Clark and Barry were more present physically although Clark was very hypervigilant and expressed how he wants his children to always sleep at home so he can be assured of their safety. Hypervigilance as a subordinate theme will be discussed in Hypervigilance as a form of protection

Clark: Imma ma ħallejtiex taffetwali l-psiko tiegħi, moħħi, jġigifieri lit-tfal kont nbiddilhom, naħsilhom, tifhem?

However, I didn't let it affect me psychologically, my mind, so I used to change them, wash them, understand?

Clark: Kont alert ħafna, ma ħadd ma naqda, la maz-ziju, la jorqdu għand ħbieb, ma ħadd. Ġejt f'sensija li hemm wisq ħażen. Filfatt daqqiet igergru għax jsaqsuni biex jorqdu għand ... ma nħallihomx.

I was very alert, I trusted (them) with nobody, not their uncle, they don't stay over at friends, with nobody. I became aware that there is too much evil. In fact they complain because they ask me to sleep over at ... I don't allow them.

Barry: Kollox up to date. Alla ħares jwegġgħu jew hekk għax kont nagħmel għageb u jkollhom mard noħodhom għand it-tabib. Normali ta, fhimt? Forsi kienu jbatu naqa għax aħna konna b'ħafna dixxiplina, allura kont inżommilhom naqra żzejjed.

Everything was up to date. God forbid they'd get hurt or something like that because I'd make a fuss and if they're sick, I'd take them to the doctor. You know, normal, understand? Maybe they suffered a bit because we were raised with a lot of discipline, so I might be more strict than necessary.

Spousal relationship in co-parenting

All the participants were married to the mothers of their children so the participants were asked about their wife's experience as a co-parent. Bruce said that his wife made up for his physical distance by taking on the lion's share of responsibility and he accepts that this was indeed more stressful on her.

Bruce: Bħala esperjenza, għal mara kienet iktar stressanti, ifhimni, stressanti min-nies ohra għax trid tagħmel ix-xogħol tar-raġel u tal-mara. Fl-istess ħin, apparti llum, hawn ħafna separazzjonijiet allura n-nisa saru jagħmlu kollox. [...] min-naħa tiegħi, ma sabitx għajjnuna. Fhimt? Dejjem inġibilha skuza għax minħabba xogħol u hekk. Mhux ser noqgħod ngħidilha għax hekk u għax hekk u għax hekk.

As an experience, it was a more stressful experience for my wife, more stressful when compared to other people as she had to do the work of the husband and the wife. At the same time, today, there are a lot of separations, so the women end up doing it all. [...] from my end, she didn't find any support. Understand? I'd always make up an excuse because of work or what not. I'm not going to tell her because of this, because of this and it's because of this.

Bruce: Dejjem ħallejt f'idejn il-mara [...] nipprova naljena rasi u nitfa kollox fuq il-mara. Allura l-mara għamlet kollox hi, jien dejjem niskappa mir-realta' kif nista.

I leave everything up to my wife, I distract myself and I leave everything up to her. So my wife did everything, I try to escape reality as best I can.

Barry on the other hand, stated that his wife had around fifty percent of the responsibilities and that they were present in taking care of their children. He states he was very supportive and did what needed to be done.

Barry: *Il-gimgha l-ohra, kont sejjer naħdem part-time, qaltli tmur xejn. Għidtilha ma mmurx, ngħin lilek hawn u għamilna sagħtejn innadfu jien u hi. It-tfal jkunu qegħdin jarawna. Jgħidu ara! Kellu bżonn jsibu hekk!*

Last week, I was going to my part-time job, she told me not to go. I told her I won't go, and I'll help her here and we spent two hours cleaning together. The children would be observing us. They'd say 'Look!' It'd be great if they find (a partner) like that.

Barry emphasises that he works as a team with his wife and explains this as follows:

Barry: *Kollox bi qbil nagħmlu; tfal meta ridna aħna, jien u hi u għadha tgħinhom sal-lum. Għadna ngħinuhom sal-lum. Meta kien hemm bżonn inżomm l-babies, inżommhom, ġieli nibgħatha torqod u noqgħod jien. Għamlet sena ma taħdimx ukoll, jiġifieri, kull meta jkollha t-tfal, ngħidilha issa int oqgħod id-dar u nieħu ħsieb il-flus jien.*

We do everything in agreement; we planned children, me and her and she still helps them to this day. We help them to this day. When the children needed to be held, I held them, sometimes I sent her to bed and stayed up with them myself. She also stopped working for a year, which means, whenever she has children, I tell her to stay at home and I'll take care of our income.

Hypervigilance as a form of protection

Participants related with the traditional role of the man, of the father, which is to protect. They all exhibited different ways in how they protect their children, to make them less likely to pass through the same experiences they endured. Bruce considered the nuclear family as remaining together a deterrent to a predator.

Bruce: *Dawk isibu nies li jkunu weak fis-soċjeta'.*

They will look for people who are considered weak in society.

Bruce: *Offrejtlihom post sigur [...] kelli moħħi mistrieħ għax l-pedoflu jsib il-weak (fis-*

soċjeta'). If-tfal tiegħi għandhom lil ommhom u lil missierhom, fhimt? Allura safe in that way.

I offered them a safe space [...] My mind was at rest because the pedophile looks for the weak (members of society). My children have their mother and father present in their lives, understand? So they are safe in that way.

Clark emphasised how he doesn't allow them to sleep outside the home because it doesn't matter who you trust.

Clark: *Ma jorqdu għand ħadd, ma nħallihom jorqdu għand ħadd. Għadhom sal-ġurnata tal-*

lum[...] nibża għax hi wegħha kbira, jekk Alla ħares qatt it-tfal tiegħi jgħaddu minn xix

għaddejt jien, hija wegħha kbira. Ħadd ieħor ma jistax jifhem minn xiex tgħaddi imma meta

tgħaddi minnha, it-tfal tiegħek tipprova tipproteġihom.

They don't sleep over, I don't let them sleep over at anyone's. This remains to this day [...]

I'm afraid because it's painful, God forbid my children go through what I went through, it's painful. Other people cannot understand what you have to go through, but when you experience that, you'll try to protect your children.

Clark: *Ma setgħux jarawni mdejjaq, qiegħda tifhem? Ma jistgħux! Ma stajtx ngħidilhom, l-*

ewwelnett kienu żgħar wisq.

They couldn't see me feeling sad, understand? They cannot! I couldn't tell them, first and foremost because they were too young.

Clark: *Pruvajt intihom naqra liberta', imma mhux iżżejjed [...] nirringrazzja lill-Mulej tat- tfal litani.*

I tried to give them their freedom, but not too much [...] I thank God for the children he blessed me with.

Clark's hypervigilance was also passed from himself to his children, as Clark saw them negotiate boundaries with other people of their opposite sex.

Clark: *Dik importanti, li ma jafdaw lil hadd. Waħda mit-tfal kellha date u l-biża' li kellha fuqha, jew kienet l-ewwel darba? [...] Għax bilfors kelli ndaħħlilhom naqa biża' jien, mhux xejn mhu xejn. Ghax jien m'għaddejtx mix-xejn mhu xejn, allura... mhux qiegħed ngħidlek li maqtugħin mid-dinja t-tfal!*

It's important, to not trust anyone. One of my children had a date, and she was very afraid, maybe it was her first time? [...] Because I had to make them afraid, it's not nothing. Because I didn't pass through nothing, so... I'm not saying they're completely cut off from the world!

As a concluding point, Bruce and Barry spoke about the topic of money which they used to make sure that their children would need to rely on no one for money. On one hand Bruce always made money available so he would protect them because they wouldn't need to seek help elsewhere, and on the other although he felt this would protect them, Bruce worries this made them more spoilt.

Bruce: *Xtrajtilha karozza, kissret l-karozza u xtrajtilha oħra.*

I bought her a car, she totalled the car and I bought her another one.

Bruce: *Għax jien ridtha tkun ħafna aħjar minni, [...] għax jien bagħtejt ħafna.*

I wanted her to be better than I was [...] because I worked very hard.

Bruce: *(Xtrajt) erbgħin/ħamsin elf ewro għodda. Kollox lest u ddejqet għax spoiled [...] naqra tbatija, oġġett mhux ser tarmih hekk.*

I spent forty/fifty thousand euro in tools. Everything is ready and she got bored because she's spoilt, if there was some hardships, she wouldn't throw an object away so readily.

Bruce: *'Trid playstation, mur ixtri playstation'. Dejqitha u ħallietha hemm*

You want a playstation, go buy a playstation. She got bored and left it there.

Barry on the other hand stated how he wanted them to study for as long as possible, so he made it easier for them to do so by providing in monetary means.

Barry: *Xtrajtilhom karozza kull wieħed*

I bought them a car each.

Barry: *Ngħidilhom 'ibqgħu studjaw għax kif tibdew taħdmu ma ngħinx iżjed'. Allura nħallihom biex jibqgħu jistudjaw, fhimt? Naqbad mitejn u ħamsin fix-xahar.*

I urge them to 'keep studying because once you start working I won't help you financially anymore'. So I let them continue studying, understand? I give them two hundred and fifty euro a month.

Difficulties in sexual relationships

Here we can also see that the experience is pervasive and impinging on the couple's sexual relationship.

Clark: *L-iktar li affetwatni, kif għidtlek, inkun mal-mara intimu, u tiġi dik ix-xena f'moħħi. Dak li bdiet iżżomni naqa lura.*

It affected me the most, as I told you, when I'm intimate with my wife, and that scene comes to my mind. That is what holds me back.

Theme 6: Reparative scripts and incorporating new meanings

Gratitude in becoming a parent

Bruce acknowledges that there are many who had the same experience who never got to the point of having children themselves and feels lucky and grateful to be able to experience parenthood.

Bruce: *Kien hemm min jiġi abbużat u ma jkollux ċans li jsir missier u jiena bħala ġenitur, qiegħed ngħidlek, nħossni lucky li jiena ġenitur jiġifieri, l-fatt li jien ġenitur, għalkemm mhux perfett, l-fatt li jien ġenitur, inħossni lucky.*

There are those who were abused and didn't get the chance to become a father. I'm telling you, I feel very lucky that I am a parent, so the fact that I am a parent, albeit not perfect, I feel lucky about the fact that I am a parent.

Barry goes on to mention that children complete their life, and he looks forward to becoming a grandfather one day.

Barry: *Tkun monotona l-ħajja mingħajrhom.*

Life would be monotonous without the children.

Barry: *Issa nixtieq li nsir nannu xi darba!*

I want to become a grandfather one day!

Gratitude in being able to love

Clark spoke about the success of adopting a new script as he was able to love his wife and children without ever receiving love as a child and he was grateful for being able to have a family to share that love with.

Dak it-tip ssir ithobb, veru, tgħid minn fejn ġiet l-imħabba, għax jien qatt ma rajt imħabba.

Ġieli nsaqsi min fejn ġiet l-imħabba li għandi lejn il-familja u lejn il-mara? Dejjem ngħid mingħand l-Mulej, għax Hu ħabbni. Heq! Issaqsi ċertu mistoqsijiet, tgħid jien kif inħobb u qatt ma ġejt maħbub mil-bnedmin?

Parenting as a form of redemption

Bruce reports how there is an unmistakably felt distance between himself and his younger child. However, Bruce is hopeful that the relationship will improve once she grows up and matures. Bruce has a much better relationship with his elder child making sense of his hypothesis that things will improve once the younger child grows up and matures, thus maintaining the current behaviour in relationship.

Bruce: Ara l-kbira tirrispettani, imma iktar matura.

The elder child respects me, but she's more mature.

Bruce: L-quddiem, malli jimmaturaw, imbagħad fhimt? Jifmuhom mod ieħor. Għax jekk per eżempju, l-mara, jekk inqasta f'xi ħaga, taf li jien għaddej minn ċertu affarijiet.

In the future, once they mature, then, you understand. They'll understand it differently.

Since for example, my wife, if I did something negative, she knows that I've been through certain experiences.

Clark stated he had a more hands on approach with his children, albeit cautious, he felt that his relationship with his children was quite close. Hypervigilance is also discussed in Hypervigilance as a form of protection.

Clark: *Ma xtaqtx minn dak li għaddejt jien, jgħaddu huma, jgħifieri għassa tagħhom il-ħin kollu. Issa llum kibru u nemmen dak li tajthom meta kienu ckejkni, iltqajt ma' l-għarajjes tagħhom [...] qaluli, vera tellajthom b'valuri sodi. Jgħifieri, għallimthom biex min xix għaddejt jien, ma jgħaddux huma.*

I didn't want them to go through what I went through, so I'm constantly vigilant. Now they're all grown up and I believe in the values I gave them as children, I met with their partners [...] they told me, they really have good, strong values. Therefore, I taught them how to avoid going through what I went through.

Barry, who also had a more hands on approach when it comes to child rearing stated the following when asked what his children would say about him.

Barry: *Meta jkolli l-birthday, jgħiduli li l-aqwa wieħed.. jgħidu! (taqbez demgħa).*

When it's my birthday, they tell me I'm the best... that's what they say (sheds a tear).

Bruce looks forward to having a better relationship as he states:

La jimmaturaw il-quddiem, la jimmaturaw u jaraw l-istorja, jgħidu d-daddy kellu raġun, f'himt? Imma mhux issa, la jikbru u jimmaturaw ftit u jaraw imbagħad jigu aware, jigu aware għalfejn importanti l-familja, għalfejn importanti dawn l-affarijiet.

Once they mature in the future, once they mature and they can see the whole story, they can say 'daddy was right', understand? But not now, once they grow up and mature a bit more, then they'll become aware, they'll become aware of why family is important and why these things are important.

Family was an important aspect of these fathers' lives. Barry highlighted how he hopes to become a grandfather one day once his children grow up and leave the nest.

Barry: *Issa nixtieq li nsir nannu xi darba!*

I want to become a grandfather one day!

Breaking the silence and shifting to advocacy

This theme, while reparative to the participants was uncomfortable for their families. Clark discussed how his children haven't discussed with him what his disclosure means to them while his wife, although initially showed support, became uncomfortable as time went on.

Clark: *Għax il-mara bdiet tiddejaq ħafna imbagħad. Jħarsu lej, jgħidulek 'kif int orrajt?'*

Imma naħseb it-tfal mhux wisq, inkella ma kellmunix, forsi żammew kollox ġo fihom.

Clark: My wife was becoming uncomfortable. They look at you, ask 'how are you?' But I think it didn't affect the children or else they didn't tell me and kept everything to themselves.

Barry also spoke about the discomfort his family feels when he speaks about his experience.

Barry: *Ngħid avolja t-tfal mhux jieħdu pjaċir, imma dik triqti u lil missierhom jridu jaċċetawh [...] bħal ma jien naċċeta lilhom [...]mhux ħa jikkmandawni t-tfal u qas il-mara ma nħallihix tikkmandani.*

This is the road I must take and even though my children are uncomfortable they must accept me [...] just as I've accepted them [...] my wife and children cannot tell me what to do here.

Breaking the silence meant disclosing and telling the world what happened. Discussing disclosure with Bruce, he took the opportunity to speak about changing the country's view on child sexual abuse and how it needed to be spoken about because it existed and secret keeping was only protecting the perpetrators.

Bruce: *Meta jien qiegħed ngħix ġo pajjiż, fejn dak iż-żmien kien taboo, kien taboo li titkellem fuqha [...] u ridt nirrangà l-affarijiet.*

When I was living in a country, where it was considered as taboo at that time to speak about it [...] and I wanted to fix things.

All participants agreed on the importance of sharing their story to help others, in fact it was one of the main reasons they agreed to partake in this research.

Bruce: *Jien għaddej minn xi ħaġa u nitkellem fuqha ħalli toħroġ xi ħaġa ta' ġid.*

I passed through an experience, and I speak about it so that good can come from it.

Clark now feels comfortable enough to talk about it in the open. However, this was not always the case. In the beginning, he had kept his experience a secret, even from his wife. Here we can also touch on the theme of shame in keeping the abuse a secret. Disclosure meant that Clark had to overcome living with shame and secrecy in his journey to be able to disclose. However, this is not something he regrets as he feels newly reborn after disclosing.

Clark: *L-mara ma kienet taf b'xejn, dik kienet problema oħra. Jien ma kont għidt lil ħadd minn dak li għaddej. L-abbuż dam għaddej sentejn.*

My wife knew of nothing, that was another problem. I hadn't told anyone what I had gone through. The abuse took place over two years.

In contrast to the feelings of shame and secrecy, Clark now talks about the experience with outsiders openly.

Clark: *Kont bil-qiegħda fuq bank u bdejt nitkellem fuq il-maħfra u minn xiex għaddej. Ġiet mara anzjana u poġġiet bil-qiegħda viċin, rajtha interessata, [...] bdejt nitkellem min xiex għaddej u fuq l-abbuż u kemm hu importanti li taħfer ħalli tkun liberu, u din iktar tinteressa ruħha. Għaddha l-ħin, qaltli 'skużani ħa jkolli nitlaq, pero ħadt pjaċir ħafna (nisma') għax jien ukoll ġejt abbużata'. Istrina! [...] Tkun ta' ġid! [...] bniedem meta jkun mgħaffeg, tgħidlu l-istorja tiegħek, jinduna li mhux waħdu mgħaffeg.*

I was sitting down on a bench, and I was discussing forgiveness and what I went through. An old woman came and sat down close to us, I saw she was interested [...] I spoke about what I experienced and about abuse and how important it is to forgive to be free, and I saw her becoming more and more interested. Time went by, she came and said 'Excuse me for having to leave, but I really enjoyed hearing the conversation because I was also abused'.

My! [...] How beneficial! [...] a fellow human being who feels crushed, after hearing your story, they won't feel alone.

Barry was able to break the threshold once he realised he had no responsibility in the abuse taking place and how once that was lifted from his shoulders, he was able to take the leap to protect other children from the same fate.

Barry: (L-familja) kollox kienu jafu u importanti li jkunu jafu, jien qatt ma ddejaqt, li nkun open. Għal l-ewwel kont nibża imma imbagħad indunajt illi jien m'għamilt xejn ħażin. [...] Tkellimt biex mmur naqbez għat-tfal l-oħra għax kieku qas kont nitkellem. Qbiżt għal dawk l-innoċenti.

(My family) knew about everything and it's important for them to know, I was never uncomfortable to be open. At first I was scared but then I realised I did nothing wrong. [...] I spoke to defend other children, otherwise I wouldn't have said anything. I defended the innocent.

Barry talks about his experience because he knows that everything used to happen in the shadows and abusers used to be able to get away with hurting children. He wants to challenge this narrative.

Barry: Ngħinu lil ħaddiehor [...] għax fis-soċjeta hawn ħafna taħwid [...] għax qabel ma kienx hawn (abbuż) u issa hawn? Kienu jibzgħu, joqgħodu lura.

We'll help others [...] because there are too many things going on in society [...] before there wasn't any (abuse) and now there is? They used to be afraid and shy away.

Conclusion

These results show us a better insight into how the individuals experience childhood sexual abuse years later in their role as parents. They show how the participants used their journey as a transformative experience and worked on methods of self-care and healing. However, the experience was still pervasive in certain areas of their lives. Concluding, the results have shown how participants practice gratitude in being able to love and to be parents, looking at parenting as a form of redemption and breaking the silence to shift to advocacy. Salient points from the results will be discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Discussion

In this chapter I will present a systemic understanding of the results with special reference to coping strategies and I shall also discuss important themes namely, shame, stigma, resilience and meaning making. I will also highlight the process of carrying out research of a sensitive nature and discuss personal reflective thoughts which will be presented from various points of view depicting my different roles. Finally, I will relate my findings with those of my fellow colleague - Ms. Vanessa Kurz.

Systemic understanding of results

Children and adolescents who live in vulnerable circumstances already experience increased struggles, even without factoring in CSA. It is challenging for such youth to find safety with any caregiver as the past has showed them that it would not necessarily be free from abuse (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). Maslow, (1943) argues that when an individual does not experience safety, they cannot satisfy their need of belonging adequately.

Therefore, coming from a challenging background is already an obstacle in itself, as discussed by a participant who stated that he was perceived unfavourably by his in-laws, although now that their perception has changed, as they rely on him a great deal for various everyday needs. In order to move forward in life, the participants had to manage and come to terms with their experience on some level, something which is not the same for any two people (Geib, 2012). In the following sections, I will discuss the general family system from the attained results.

Shame, stigma, and secret keeping

Bruce, Clark, and Barry married without disclosing their CSA to the authorities or to their spouses. The themes of secrecy, stigma, and shame were already prevalent even before marriage. Avoidant coping strategies such as disengagement and self-isolation (Wright et al., 2007) indicate

how some participants still carry the experience of CSA as shameful and stigmatising even though the participant might be actively coping with the situation from another angle, that is, in some of the participants' cases, the participants took a step back when actively discussing their experience with their family which is a huge contrast to their disclosure to the relevant authorities.

Another setback which had hindered disclosure is the underlying loyalties present to a father-like figure. When actively weighing what the perpetrator had meant to the individual in contrast to the pain caused, contextual therapy describes how survivors feel trapped by the unconscious, covert loyalty which creates the expectation that to act differently might carry the consequence of psychological loss or the non-survival of their parent or caretaker (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).

This would further enhance the concept of secret keeping. From a family therapist perspective, Rober, (2012) discusses family secrets where the research goes on to discuss two critical questions a family therapist should ask, that is ""who knows the secret?" and "who does not know the secret?"" (Rober et al., 2011, p. 529).

On a local level, shame and stigma are very prominent aspects to consider, considering Malta's culture as discussed in Maltese Context where gossip as information is deeply embodied. In foreign research, media has framed numerous difficulties as an individual difficulty rather than a societal difficulty. Some examples of difficulties include "AIDS, alcoholism, child abuse, cigarette addiction, drug abuse, and overeating (Hallahan, 1999, p. 220). Weatherred, (2015) also discusses how CSA is not seen as a societal difficulty and continues to add how globally, the public has a poor understanding of how to prevent it and what causes it. Popović, (2021) discusses how Croatian media and how they portray CSA. Twenty-five percent make use of consensual language when describing CSA, twenty percent assigned blame for the abuse to the survivors and fifteen percent labelled the survivor as permanently broken. This study found how the Croatian media contributed to the "stigmatization and victimization of the survivors" (Popović, 2021, p. 230).

Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson (1992) discusses how certain myths portray male-on-male abuse as an indication of homosexual tendencies of one or both parties. This left participants such as Clark wondering about the validity of the myth for some time, and it may have been one of the reasons for others to avoid disclosure. “Self-consciousness involves continually monitoring self from the point of view of others” (Scheff, 2005, p. 147,) and this self-construction of shame is very harmful especially when it is used as a method to keep the abuse a secret (Hlavka, 2016). Systemic family therapists note that while disclosures have been made during therapy sessions, the presenting problem was rarely related to CSA (Kurz, 2021)

Managing parental roles

Participants and their wives negotiated their roles as parents where the mothers took on more obligations, such as full responsibility when it came to raising their children - *“I distract myself and I leave everything up to her. So my wife did everything, I try to escape reality as best I can”*, or taking over educational decisions - *“She works in a position of trust so I trust in her”*, while the participants took on a protective role when relating with their children. This was shown through the distance they kept from their children; either by eliminating all physical contact or becoming hypervigilant, and by ensuring that their children have enough money - *“I spent forty/fifty thousand euro on tools”, “I bought them a car each.”*. Avoiding all physical contact affected the father-daughter relationship where the distance was also translated to emotional distance - *“she always found her mother, so I would be like, I don’t know, her step-father”*, while being hypervigilant was passed on to their children intentionally - *“It’s important, to not trust anyone”*.

Meaning making

Participants were managing their experience as a multistage process where they attempted to make sense of the ordeal especially by identifying what the abuser looked for - *“He was very wise,*

he used to find the weak”, “They bought me with love to use me and take what they wanted from me”, and found solace in various coping skills namely sports and spirituality. Participants reframed their pain as a transformative experience and as a step towards meaning-making.

Once the participants decided to disclose the abuse suffered, family members were initially very supportive, but some became apprehensive later due to other people’s reactions. The children and mother in the family also needed to find various ways to cope and adjust to the reality. Some of the family members have become feistier in their interactions with the participants while other family members would prefer to avoid discussions pertaining to the abuse.

Bruce, Clark, Barry, and their respective families did not attend therapy individually or as a family, therefore they weren’t able to make sense and reflect on how the ordeal impinged on their life in a safe, supportive, and therapeutic space. Nonetheless, participants utilised other means to cope such as visiting spiritual or medical personnel. While this helped alleviate personal feelings, it was not done systemically together as a family and hence missed out on the support they could have received from each other during this process.

The results have clearly shown how pervasive the abuse was in many aspects of the participants’ lives and while this was clear, not many were certain on how the disclosure affected their children’s lives and what meaning they made from it. Some of the children’s response to the position their parents took was to display anger when being reprimanded - *“Sometimes I used to discipline her and she’d tell me ‘I hate you’”*, finding it difficult to be independent or adopting the same hypervigilant behaviour. It was very interesting to note that while the participants had disclosed to their families, moved towards maintaining resilience, worked on continuously breaking the silence and shifted towards providing advice to the relevant authorities and outside world, they did not follow the same practice with their families, further highlighting the importance of systemic family work with individuals who experienced CSA and their families throughout the delicate process.

Resilience

Wright et al., (2007) also discuss how individuals who found meaning in their incest-experience functioned better than those who did not, further backing some of the participants' insistence on meaning-making and the importance of finding something good in the experience, although always highlighting that in an ideal world they would not have had to experience the abuse at all. While meaning-making has been beneficial to the participants, unlike the pervasiveness of the negative attributes of the abuse and hypervigilance, this was not transferred or if it was, it was unclear or not something that the individual believed had occurred.

A striking character trait exhibited by the participants was their level of resilience enabling them to find gratitude at being able to love (especially seeing as this was not a learnt behaviour) and gratitude in being parents. Parenting was seen as a form of redemption as the participants' resilience enabled them to push through. The theme of resilience was further emphasised when participants spoke of handing the appropriate blame to the offender rather than internalising it (Dufour & Nadeau, 2001), maintaining education as important for their children (Pharris et al., 1997) and finding meaning through religiosity (Tarakeshwar et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2012). Tarakeshwar et al., (2006) also emphasise the importance of optimism, perceived support, growth, and meaning.

Intergenerational Perspective

Research found that children of CSA survivors were more prone to have extreme coping schemes of attachment when compared with children of mothers who were not CSA survivors (Kwako et al., 2010). This was also reflected in the results when participants discussed attachment difficulties between themselves and their children as well as their children adopting their parent's hypervigilance as a protective technique. Grocke et al., (1995) discusses how many mothers who reported CSA engaged in detailed conversations with their child regarding sexual maturity and contraception when compared to mothers who had not experienced CSA. A willingness to acknowledge and discuss led to more discussions relating to sexuality.

Upon assessing children of the sexually abused children (now adults) for self-esteem, depression, and behaviour at the time of diagnosis, after one year and a half and after five years no difference was found in any measures during these three intervals between children whose mothers had experienced child sexual abuse in comparison with children whose mothers had not been abused (Oates et al., 1998).

Recommendations for services

The necessity for new advances to enhance and react to CSA is felt at a global level (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2016). The systemic discussion of results presented important findings including the importance of having access to services providing support for the entire family. This is crucial as the issue is not solely an individual issue but a family issue, hence services or authorities must emphasise that support is offered to the whole family, and any individual who discloses should be offered therapeutic help (for themselves and their family) with the therapist of their choice beyond the confines of a particular institution.

Unless their attendance to therapy is facilitated, families cannot receive adequate support, creating dissonance through the family system. Attendance to therapy can be facilitated by making the individual and their support system aware of the services offered. Family services are important not only to support the individual who discloses but to aid their partner and children as they would not know how to react and interact with their loved one along with also needing personal support.

Institutions where disclosures are reported, such as the Malta Police Force, should be equipped with all such relevant information to present to individuals when cases are reported. Institutions who receive disclosures should work jointly with other institutions such as Victim Support Malta (VSM) and other entities to offer support. That way, families can be aware that support offered isn't only medical and is available to the entire family - the media also have a very important role in this regard. Israeli research argues that there is a significant gap between certified

research results and what is portrayed in the media begging for future collaborations to ensure that responsible reporting of child abuse is carried out (Katz et al., 2019).

Self-Reflexivity

Possible effects on the researcher

Researching such a sensitive topic will undoubtedly stir up many emotions especially when researching for a prolonged period of time. Shannonhouse et al., (2016) showed how second-hand contact can still leave professionals experiencing burnout, indirect traumatising, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress. Symptoms include psychological distress such as feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, grief, extreme anger, and guilt. Newell & MacNeil (2011) even carried out the same research with administrative and professional groups working at a medical centre, and found that even though they had different responsibilities, their work was likewise emotionally strenuous. Kurz, (2021) acknowledges how working with trauma affects therapists in a variety of ways and emphasises on the importance of self-care since therapists were affected on both a personal and professional level.

Self-reflexivity on a personal level

Reflecting on a personal level has led me to think about how I related with the study on various levels. As a woman I felt I had to be more open and curious to attempt to understand better the male participants' point of view, and therefore I feel that I asked them to deconstruct more than I would have should the participant had been a female.

Although this was a heavy and sensitive topic to discuss, the fact that I did not pass through the same experiences increased my curiosity and enabled me to remain more neutral. The participants are also older than I am and thus are currently experiencing a different stage of the family-life cycle. Reflecting on the family-life cycle, I felt I could relate more with the stage their children were at, which led me to reflect on possible angles for new research. As a wife, I couldn't

help but reflect and empathise with the difficulty of finding out that your husband, and the father of your children, was betrayed by the person who was the closest thing they had to a father.

As someone who might become a mother in the future, delving into this research has shown me that often, predators are close by - a wolf in sheep's clothing, and I admit, I believe that after this experience, I will be more vigilant on the matter pertaining to my future children as opposed to my experience of parenthood without having undergone this research experience. Finally, from the perspective of an educator who teaches adolescent male students, it was one thing listening to a grown man speak retrospectively about how the experience has impacted him, however, it was another thing to think back to my students' faces and make the connection that they are the same age the participants were when they went through the abuse. Once that connection was made, I felt I could better understand the serious extent of what the abuse meant: to have children robbed of their childhood, innocence, and individual path towards discovering their individuality. This research will forever change me as an educator just as it has changed me in other aspects, further proving the pervasive nature of abuse - in that it has affected my life even simply through the direct experience of another.

Making Connections to my colleague's systemic research

Kurz's (2021) research showed how a group of five systemic therapists experience couple work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Results showed that therapists acknowledged the importance of creating safety for clients and that collaboration is important. Safety was created through containment, discovering whether it was safe to tell the truth, and to invest in the therapeutic relationship. Collaboration was fostered by adapting to the clients' needs, by facilitating difficult conversations and sharing responsibility. Participants' families have exhibited how difficult it was to find words to express the experience and work towards meaning individually. This study discusses the possible effects on the researcher. Kurz furthers this by discussing the self and the role of the therapist, and second-hand trauma and self-care practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The main aim of this research was to explore how the experience of parenting is affected when an individual would have endured childhood sexual abuse. This was done with respect to the local context. Additionally, the aim was to provide professionals, educators, and other interested individuals a better insight into the survivors' experience as well as how they managed to co-parent with the other biological parent of their children as they positioned themselves in the family system.

Recommendations for future research

There are no local systemic research works with regards to CSA survivors except for the work entitled "Couple Work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse; Personal and Professional Experiences of Systemic Family Therapists" which is currently being carried out by Ms. Vanessa Kurz.

Further studies into perceiving meaning-making and resilience techniques employed by family members of an individual who experienced CSA on a local level, would help professionals and institutions support the family better. Recommendations for future research are plentiful. Local research focused on exploring motherhood amongst childhood sexual abuse survivors would be very beneficial in providing a contrast with this research. Other ideas include researching the experience of individuals whose parents are childhood sexual abuse survivors and media portrayals of child sexual abuse survivors.

As a result of the limited number of resident research, local researchers are given no choice but to look towards foreign research. Foreign research, while very informative will omit the social constructionist perspective of the Maltese culture, and hence, the richness native research would be able to provide. Further research as mentioned above would provide more insight.

Research Limitations

A key limitation of the research lies in its lack of generalisation, that is, it cannot be applied to the entire Maltese male individuals who experienced CSA and are now parents. Whilst this research provided a medium to share the experience of these individuals, since it is qualitative research, it cannot provide the same advantages quantitative research can provide. Another point is that because it's based on the Maltese population, the results might be limitedly relevant to other populations.

This research was conducted decades after the abuse had finished and years after disclosure. Results might vary should the research be repeated with the same participants in the future, during a different part of their lifecycle such as when they are parents and grandparents, or if the research had been conducted closer to when they disclosed.

Unfortunately, since the population sample was small, a pilot study could not be carried out. If possible, a pilot study would help in identifying parts of the interview which weren't clear and what needed improvement on those fronts. Lastly, even though during the interview process many clarifications and deconstructions were made, due to the difficulty in securing participants, the time limit was even tighter which did not leave room to discuss the results with the participants.

Concluding thoughts

The participants who graciously accepted to take part in this study have aimed to continually work at breaking the silence so that they may be of service to others, and I hope that I have managed to be a part of that journey. By means of this research, themes from participants' experiences emerged to help gain a better systemic understanding of these experiences within the social construction. This experience has been invaluable, and I will be forever thankful for the trust and honesty the participants have shown.

REFERENCES

References

- Allbaugh, L. J., Wright, M. O., & Seltmann, L. A. (2014). An exploratory study of domains of parenting concern among mothers who are childhood sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 23*(8), 885-899. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2014.960636>
- Attard Montalto, S., & Mangion, M. (2007). Child abuse in Malta: a review. *Malta Medical Journal, 19*(1), 6-11.
- Bacon, H., & Richardson, S. (2001). Attachment theory and child abuse: An overview of the literature for practitioners. *Child Abuse Review, 10*(6), 377-397. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.718>
- Barrett, B. (2009). The impact of childhood sexual abuse and other forms of childhood adversity on adulthood parenting. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 18*(5), 489-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538710903182628>
- Barrett, B. (2010). Childhood sexual abuse and adulthood parenting: The mediating role of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 19*(3), 323-346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771003705205>
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. (1973). *Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Centres for Disease Control and Intervention. (2021, February 5). *Risk and protective factors*. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.htm>

Childhub. (2021, November 18). *To prevent sexual abuse, children's circle of trust must be made*

safer / ChildHub. ChildHub - Child Protection Hub. <https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-news/prevent-sexual-abuse-childrens-circle-trust-must-be-made-safer?language=en>

Council of Europe. (2018). *Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The strategies* (2). Lanzarote Committee. <https://rm.coe.int/2nd-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808d9c85>

Crowther, J. L., & Lloyd-Williams, M. (2012). Researching sensitive and emotive topics: The participants' voice. *Research Ethics*, 8(4), 200-211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016112455887>

Dallos, R., & Draper, R. (2015). *EBOOK: An introduction to family therapy: Systemic theory and practice*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

De Bellis, M. D., Spratt, E. G., & Hooper, S. R. (2011). Neurodevelopmental biology associated with childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 20(5), 548-587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2011.607753>

Decker, S. E., Naugle, A. E., Carter-Visscher, R., Bell, K., & Seifert, A. (2011). Ethical issues in research on sensitive topics: Participants' experiences of distress and benefit. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 6(3), 55-64. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2011.6.3.55>

Deering, R., & Mellor, D. (2011). An exploratory qualitative study of the self-reported impact of female-perpetrated childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 20(1), 58-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2011.539964>

Denny, E., & Weckesser, A. (2018). Qualitative research: What it is and what it is not. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 126(3), 369-

369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.15198>

Dimitrova, N., Pierrehumbert, B., Glatz, N., Torrisi, R., Heinrichs, M., Halfon, O., & Chouchena, O.

(2009). Closeness in relationships as a mediator between sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence and psychopathological outcome in adulthood. *Clinical Psychology &*

Psychotherapy, 17(3), 183-195. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.650>

Doyle, T. P. (2008). The spiritual trauma experienced by victims of sexual abuse by Catholic

clergy. *Pastoral Psychology*, 58(3), 239-260. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-008-0187-1>

Dufour, M. H., & Nadeau, L. (2001). Sexual Abuse: A Comparison Between Resilient Victims and

Drug-Addicted Victims. *Violence and Victims*, 16(6), 655-672.

Easton, S. D., Coohy, C., O'leary, P., Zhang, Y., & Hua, L. (2010). The effect of childhood sexual

abuse on psychosexual functioning during adulthood. *Journal of Family Violence*, 26(1), 41-

50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-010-9340-6>

ECPAT International. (2021, December 9). *About Us*. ECPAT. <https://ecpat.org/about-us/>

Editorial. (2020, August 24). Editorial: confronting childhood sexual violence. *Times of*

Malta. [https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/confronting-childhood-sexual-](https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/confronting-childhood-sexual-violence.813831)

[violence.813831](https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/confronting-childhood-sexual-violence.813831)

Frawley-O'Dea, M. G., & Goldner, V. (2016). *Predatory priests, silenced victims: The sexual abuse crisis and the Catholic Church*. Routledge.

Geib, M. (2012). *COMING TO TERMS WITH ABUSIVE CHILDHOOD SEXUAL EXPERIENCES: A LISTENING GUIDE STUDY OF WOMEN'S STORIES* [Doctoral dissertation]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction*. SAGE.

Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, B. (2019). Children's rights and teachers' responsibilities: Reproducing or transforming the cultural taboo on child sexual abuse? *Human Rights Education Review*, 2(1), 25-46. <https://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3079>

GREVIO. (2020). *Baseline Evaluation Report Malta*. <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-inf-2020-17-malta-final-report-web/1680a06bd2>

Grocke, M., Smith, M., & Graham, P. (1995). Sexually abused and nonabused mothers' discussions about sex and their children's sexual knowledge. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19(8), 985-996. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134\(95\)00060-l](https://doi.org/10.1016/0145-2134(95)00060-l)

Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(3), 205-242. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1103_02

Hlavka, H. R. (2016). Speaking of stigma and the silence of shame. *Men and Masculinities*, 20(4), 482-505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x16652656>

- Independent. (2012, November 13). Judgment confirmed for priests who sexually abused boys. *Independent*. <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2012-11-13/news/judgment-confirmed-for-priests-who-sexually-abused-boys-381714435/>
- INHOPE. (2022, March 8). What is the Lanzarote committee? <https://inhope.org/EN/articles/what-is-the-lanzarote-committee?locale=en>
- Kacprzak, K. (2017). From bad through good to excellent interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) studies – presenting set of criteria to evaluate IPA papers and to provide high-quality future research. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 8(2), 53-68. <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs20172.53.68>
- Katz, C., Glucklich, T., & Piller, S. (2019). Child maltreatment in the media: Analyses of media coverage and reader comments on child maltreatment in Israel. *Child Abuse Review*, 28(2), 127-138. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2546>
- Kurz, V. (2021). Couple work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse; Personal and Professional Experiences of Systemic Family Therapists [Unpublished masters dissertation]. Institute of Family Therapy, Malta.
- Kwako, L. E., Noll, J. G., Putnam, F. W., & Trickett, P. K. (2010). Childhood sexual abuse and attachment: An intergenerational perspective. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 15(3), 407-422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104510367590>
- Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp062oa>

Malta population (2021). (n.d.). Worldometer - real time world

statistics. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/malta-population/>

Martsof, D. S., & Draucker, C. B. (2008). The legacy of childhood sexual abuse and family

adversity. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 40(4), 333-340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2008.00247.x>

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-

396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>

Mathews, B., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2016). Child sexual abuse: Raising awareness and empathy is

essential to promote new public health responses. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 37(3), 304-314. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jphp.2016.21>

McElvaney, R. (2013). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: Delays, non-disclosure and partial disclosure.

What the research tells us and implications for practice. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(3), 159-169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2280>

Murray, L. K., Nguyen, A., & Cohen, J. A. (2014). Child sexual abuse. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric*

Clinics of North America, 23(2), 321-337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2014.01.003>

Newell, J. M., & MacNeil, G. A. (2011). A comparative analysis of burnout and professional quality of

life in clinical mental health providers and health care administrators. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 26(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2011.540978>

Nguyen, L. (2011). The ethics of trauma: Re-traumatization in society's approach to the traumatized subject. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 61(1), 26-47. <https://doi.org/10.1521/ijgp.2011.61.1.26>

Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: An appropriate methodology for educational research? *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(1), 75-83. <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i1.304>

Oates, R., Tebbutt, J., Swanston, H., Lynch, D. L., & O'Toole, B. I. (1998). Prior childhood sexual abuse in mothers of sexually abused children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22(11), 1113-1118. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0145-2134\(98\)00091-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0145-2134(98)00091-x)

Peter, T. (2008). Exploring taboos. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(7), 1111-1128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508322194>

Pharris, M., Resnick, M., & Blum, R. (1997). Protecting against hopelessness and suicidality in sexually abused American Indian adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 21(6), 400-406. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x\(97\)00166-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(97)00166-3)

Plastock, H., Bruce, C., & White, N. (2021). Survivors' decision-making around legal initiation for historic CSA: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 30(4), 482-497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2021.1883788>

Popović, S. (2021). Presentation of victims in the press coverage of child sexual abuse in Croatia. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 30(2), 230-251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2020.1871459>

- Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., & Hendry, C. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: A discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(3), 20-24. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2011.04.18.3.20.c8459>
- Radhika, K., Manjula, M., & Jaisooriya, T. (2018). Ethical gaps in conducting research among adult survivors of child sexual abuse: A review. *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.20529/ijme.2018.046>
- Richardson, S., & Bacon, H. (2001). *Creative responses to child sexual abuse: Challenges and dilemmas*. Jessica Kingsley Pub.
- Riley, J. (2020). *An Interpretative Phenonomological Approach (IPA) to Shame and Intimacy in Female Child Sexual Abuse Survivors* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Adler University.
- Rober, P., Walravens, G., & Versteynen, L. (2011). "In search of a tale they can live with": About loss, family secrets, and selective disclosure. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(3), 529-541. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00237.x>
- Scheff, T. J. (2005). Looking-glass self: Goffman as symbolic interactionist. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(2), 147-166. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2005.28.2.147>
- Shannonhouse, L., Barden, S., Jones, E., Gonzalez, L., & Murphy, A. (2016). Secondary traumatic stress for trauma researchers: A mixed methods research design. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 38(3), 201-216. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.38.3.02>
- Sigurdardottir, S., Halldorsdottir, S., & Bender, S. S. (2012). Deep and almost unbearable suffering: Consequences of childhood sexual abuse for men's health and well-being. *Scandinavian*

Journal of Caring Sciences, 26(4), 688-697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2012.00981.x>

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.

Steenbakk, A., Ellingsen, I. T., Van der Steen, S., & Grietens, H. (2017). Psychosocial needs of children in foster care and the impact of sexual abuse. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(4), 1324-1335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0970-7>

Struckman-Johnson, C., & Struckman-Johnson, D. (1992). Acceptance of male rape myths among college men and women. *Sex Roles*, 27(3-4), 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00290011>

Sultana, R. G., & Baldacchino, G. (1994). *Maltese society: A sociological inquiry*.

Tarakshwar, N., Hansen, N. B., Kochman, A., Fox, A., & Sikkema, K. J. (2006). Resiliency among individuals with childhood sexual abuse and HIV: Perspectives on addressing sexual trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 19(4), 449-460. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20132>

Tener, D., & Murphy, S. B. (2014). Adult disclosure of child sexual abuse. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 391-400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014537906>

UNICEF. (2018, June 14). What we do- unicef. <https://www.unicef.org/what-we-do>

UNICEF. (2022). Every child is protected from violence and exploitation.

<https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-annual-results-2021-goal-area-3#GARRGA3download>

Vilenica, S., Shakespeare-Finch, J., & Obst, P. (2013). Exploring the process of meaning making in healing and growth after childhood sexual assault: A case study approach. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 39-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2012.728074>

Vrolijk-Bosschaart, T. F., Brilleslijper-Kater, S. N., Benninga, M. A., Lindauer, R. J., & Teeuw, A. H. (2018). Clinical practice: Recognizing child sexual abuse—what makes it so difficult? *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 177(9), 1343-1350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-018-3193-z>

Walls, P., Parahoo, K., Fleming, P., & McCaughan, E. (2010). Issues and considerations when researching sensitive issues with men: Examples from a study of men and sexual health. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(1), 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2010.10.18.1.26.c8045>

Weatherred, J. L. (2015). Child sexual abuse and the media: A literature review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24(1), 16-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2015.976302>

World Health Organisation. (2020, June 8). *Child maltreatment*. WHO | World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

Wright, M. O., Crawford, E., & Sebastian, K. (2007). Positive resolution of childhood sexual abuse experiences: The role of coping, benefit-finding and meaning-making. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(7), 597-608. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-007-9111-1>

Wright, M. O., Fopma-Loy, J., & Oberle, K. (2012). In their own words: The experience of mothering as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(2), 537-552. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579412000144>

Xuereb, M., & Borg, B. (2021, February 1). Gozo bishop describes 'burden' of knowing of priests' alleged sex abuse. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/live-blog-gozo-bishop-anton-teuma-testifies-in-priests-sex-abuse-cases.848726>

Yates, P. (2016). Sibling sexual abuse: Why don't we talk about it? *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 26(15-16), 2482-2494. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.13531>

Appendix

Participation Form

Title: “Exploring parenthood amongst child sexual abuse survivors”

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it's important to understand why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information.

Who I am and some information about the study:

My name is Karen Quintano, and I am sitting for my final year in Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy. As part of my course, I decided to focus my research on the lived experience of parents who were sexually abused as minors, to bring to light how the experience has influenced their parenting. This research is being conducted for a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy.

What will taking part involve?

You will take part in interview/s either at the Institute of Family Therapy, via Zoom or at a safe space of your own choosing. The interviews will be recorded. The conversation will be focused on your experience as a parent.

Why have you been invited to take part?

This letter has been forwarded to you by individuals who value your life experiences as well as your experiences as a parent. By means of this research, we aim to help professionals understand better the needs of individuals who passed through similar experiences as well as helping to act in the best interest of the parents and their children.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question and withdraw at any part of the interview. After the interview you will have a month to let me know if you would not like your interviews to be used in the study after all.

Confidentiality

Great lengths will be taken to ensure your confidentiality. Your name will be changed in all instances and any identifiable information will be changed in all instances.

The only reason where confidentiality may be broken is if there is a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm to self or others.

All information will be stored on a hard drive and only I will have access to it. Information will be deleted after the research has been published. You will have access to your information at any time during the study until it has been deleted. With your consent, if you are willing, I will be able to meet you again to make sure that I am representing your experience adequately and in full respect of confidentiality. This meeting would take place before the dissertation is presented.

If you feel upset after our interviews, kindly let me know and I will refer to you IFT-Malta for therapy.

What will happen to the results?

Current plans consist in submitting a dissertation. This will be available online on IFT-Malta's web page.

Who should you contact for further information?

Researcher: Karen Quintano

Email address: karenquintano18@gmail.com

Mobile nr:

Supervisor: Karen Bishop

Email address: vellakaren@gmail.com

Mobile nr:

Consent Form

Consent form to be filled by both me as the researcher and you as the participant.

This document will explain the interview process where you give your formal consent for the interview to take place. It's important to ask if something isn't clear.

"Exploring parenthood amongst child sexual abuse survivors"

For the researcher:

I would like to acknowledge that I, Karen Quintano have given a copy of the participation form and consent form, then, explained, to the best of my ability, to the participant, the purpose and procedures of the aforementioned study. I also confirm that the participant was given the opportunity to bring forward any questions s/he might have about this research and that all questions have been answered in an honest and detailed manner.

Recordings and the copies of the transcript will be available only to my supervisor and myself, and this material will be destroyed upon publication of this research. I also certify that all information obtained during the interview will be used solely for the purpose of this research.

For the participant:

I certify that I, _____ agree to participate in the aforementioned study freely. I received the participation and consent form and I have understood what my participation entails.

Karen Quintano

Participant

Date

Il-Formola ta' Parteċipazzjoni

It-Titlu: L-Esplorazzjoni ta' kif tkun ġenitur fost individwi li għaddew minn abbuż sesswali meta kienu minorenni

Nixtieq nistiednek sabiex tiegħu sehem fi studju ta' riċerka. Qabel ma tiddeċiedi, importanti li tifhem l-iskop ta' din ir-riċerka u x'jinvolvi jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem. Jekk jogħġbok aqra din l-informazzjoni sew u nistiednek titlobni kjarifiki fejn ikollok bżonn iktar informazzjoni.

Min jien u ftit informazzjoni fuq l-istudju:

Jiena Karen Quintano u qiegħda fl-aħħar sena tal-*Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy*. Bħala parti mill-kors, iddeċidejt li niffoka din ir-riċerka fuq l-esperjenza ta' ġenituri li kienu abbużati sesswalment meta kienu minorenni, sabiex jintefa' dawl fuq kif din influwenzat l-esperjenza tagħhom bħala ġenituri. Din ir-riċerka qiegħda ssir bħala parti mir-rekwiżiti tal-*Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy*.

X'tinvolvi l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek?

Inti ser tiegħu sehem f'intervista/i ġewwa l-*Institute of Family Therapy*, jew fuq Zoom jew f'post sigur tal-għażla tiegħek. L-intervisti se jkunu rrekordjati. Il-konversazzjoni ser tkun iffokata fuq l-esperjenza tiegħek bħala ġenitur.

Għalfejn ġejt mistieden biex tipparteċipa?

Din l-ittra ġiet mogħtija lilek minn persuni li jistmaw l-esperjenzi tiegħek tal-ħajja, u bħala ġenitur. Permezz ta' dan l-istudju, nixtiequ li l-esperjenzi tiegħek jgħinu professjonisti varji jifhmu l-bżonnijiet ta' min għadda minn esperjenzi simili u jharsu dejjem aħjar l-interessi tal-individwi ġenituri u wliedhom.

Bilfors irrid nipparteċipa?

Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek hi kompletament volontarja u għandek id-dritt li tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, li tirrifjuta li twieġeb kwalunkwe mistoqija u li twaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni

tiegħek f'kwalunkwe hin tal-intervista. Jekk inti terġa' taħsibha wara l-intervista, għandek xahar ċans sabiex tinfurmani jekk ma tridx li l-intervista tiegħek tintuża f'dan l-istudju.

Kunfidenzjalità

Ser jittieħdu ħafna miżuri biex nassiguraw il-kunfidenzjalità. L-isem tiegħek ser jinbidel f'kull mument u kwalunke informazzjoni identifikabbli ser tinbidel dejjem.

L-uniku raġuni għaliex tista' tinkiser il-kunfidenzjalità hi f'każ ta' possibilità qawwija li jkun hemm riskju serju ta' ħsara lilek innifsek jew oħrajn.

Ir-rekording u xogħol tiegħi fuqu ser jinżamm għo *hard drive* lokali li tkun aċċessibbli biss minni. L-informazzjoni titħassar meta r-riċerka titlesta. Inti ser ikollok aċċess għall-informazzjoni tiegħek f'kwalunkwe hin ta' din ir-riċerka sakemm tiġi mħassra. Jekk tkun ix-xewqa tiegħek u bil-kunsens tiegħek, inkun nista' nerga' niltaqa' miegħek biex taċċerta li qiegħda nirrapreżenta l-esperjenza tiegħek b'mod adegwat u b'kull rispett lejn il-kunfidenzjalità.

Jekk tħossok skomdu wara l-intervista, jew tinduna li għandek bżonn iktar support, nitolbok tinfurmani sabiex inkun nista nirreferik lil *IFT-Malta* għat-terapija.

Xi jsir bir-riżultati

Il-pjan preżenti huwa li jintużaw fid-dissertazzjoni. Din ser tkun aċċessibbli onlajn fis-sit tal-*IFT-Malta*.

Lil min għandek tikkuntattja għal iktar informazzjoni

Ir-riċerkattriċi: Karen Quintano

L-indirizz elettroniku: karenquintano18@gmail.com

In-numru tal-mowbajl:

Is-supervizur: Karen Bishop

L-indirizz elettroniku: vellakaren@gmail.com

In-numru tal-mowbajl:

Il-Formola ta' Kunsens

Din il-formola għandha tiġi ffirmata minni bħala riċerkattriċi u minnek bħala l-partecipant.

Dan id-dokument ser jispjega l-proċedura tal-intervista fejn inti tagħti kunsens formali biex din isir. Huwa important li tistaqsi jekk xi affarijiet mhumiex ċari għalik qabel ma tiffirma.

It-Title: L-Esplorazzjoni ta' kif tkun ġenitur fost individwi li għaddew minn abbuż sesswali meta kienu minorenni

Għar-riċerkattriċi:

Nixtieq nikkonferma li jien, Karen Quintano, tajt kopja tal-ittra ta' partecipazzjoni u l-formola ta' kunsens, u spjegajt bl-aħjar mod possibbli bil-kapaċitajiet tiegħi, lill-partecipant, l-iskop u l-proċeduri tal-imsemmi studju. Nikkonferma wkoll li l-partecipant ġie mogħti l-opportunità li jressaq kwalunkwe mistoqsija li jkollu dwar din ir-riċerka u li kull mistoqsija giet imwieġba b'mod mill-iktar onest u dettaljat.

Ir-recordings u t-transcripts tal-intervista/i ser ikunu aċċessibli biss mis-supervizur u minni, u dan il-materjal jiġi meqrud darba għal dejjem malli titlesta r-riċerka. Nikkonferma wkoll illi kull informazzjoni li tittieħed waqt l-intervista ser tintuża biss għall-iskop ta' din ir-riċerka.

Għall-partecipant:

Jien _____ naċċetta li nipparteċipa fl-istudju deskritt minn jeddi. Jien irċivejt l-ittra ta' partecipazzjoni u l-formola ta' kunsens u fhimt minn xiex tikkonsisti l-partecipazzjoni tiegħi.

Karen Quintano

Il-partecipant

Id-data