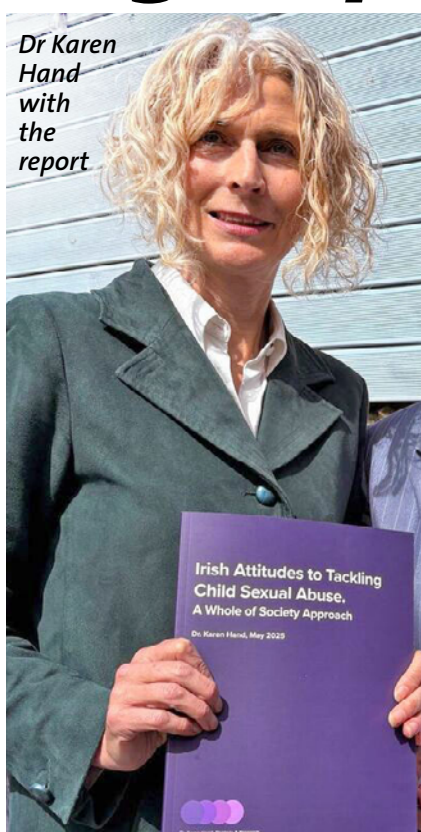




NEWSLETTER

Understanding the problem from a public health angle – and aiming at prevention

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR a report entitled *Irish Attitudes to Tackling Child Sexual Abuse: A Whole of Society Approach* was launched with a presentation by the author, Dr Karen Hand, of the key findings. The research on which the report is based was funded by the Department of Justice and Community Foundation Ireland. The initiative for the research project came from One in Four, which provides counselling and advocacy services to adult survivors of abuse, and the researcher collaborated with researchers from Children's Health Ireland and the National Child Safety Taskforce. The report is an important and valuable document. It maps out an approach to tackling the scourge of child sexual abuse in Ireland and the immense suffering it causes to victims, survivors and their loved ones, as well as the damage it does to the fabric



of Irish society and its institutions. The report's 'whole of society' approach is about understanding the problem from a public health per-

spective that aims at prevention. Prevention operates at different levels:

- Primary prevention is that which we can all do to prevent children from being abused
- Secondary prevention addresses early warning signs of child sexual abuse
- Tertiary prevention is the response to child sexual abuse when it happens in order to ensure that it does not happen again
- Quaternary prevention is about evaluating and improving preventative interventions to ensure that they are operating effectively

The Catholic Church in Ireland intervenes at each of these levels. Much of the work we do in the Diocese focuses on the first three levels. Raising awareness about child sexual abuse, as we do through training and initiatives such as Safeguarding

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Report looks at data from statistics office and polling

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Sunday, operates at the level of primary prevention. When we address concerns, such as people not following our Code of Practice for dealing with children, we are identifying potential threats to the safety of children and eliminating them (secondary prevention). The work of case management is about responding to information that abuse has occurred or may have occurred and ensuring that it is not repeated (tertiary prevention). The Irish Bishops' Conference, together with AMRI, the group representing religious orders in Ireland, recently commissioned a consultancy company, RSM, to evaluate the Church's approach to safeguarding and child protection. RSM made a series of recommendations, which are currently either under consideration or in the process of being implemented. This is an example of quaternary prevention.

The Report presents recently available new data from two sources: a Sexual Violence Survey carried out in 2022 by the Central Statistics Office and a poll conducted by Red C (a commercial polling company) in 2024. The first of these presents information on the incidence of child sexual abuse while the second is concerned with

An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh Central Statistics Office

Sexual Violence Survey 2022 - Main Results



Sexual violence is defined as a range of non-consensual experiences from non-contact experiences to non-consensual sexual intercourse. See report for further details.

Some of the statistics from the 2022 CSO survey. See www.cso.ie

people's perception of the problem and how it can best be addressed. The Report then considers the implications of this new data.

The CSO survey found that 29% of all the adults surveyed experienced sexual violence in childhood. However, the figure rises to 41% for the youngest adult cohort surveyed, that is, those aged 18 to 24 years. The clear implication is that the problem of child sexual abuse is getting worse, not better. This is a profoundly depressing finding. It is helpful, however, to drill down into the findings to find out what might be happening in Irish society to explain this finding. Among this group of young adults, the abuse they suffered was more likely to have been perpetrated by their peers and less likely to have been

perpetrated by those described as 'authority figures', than was the case for the older age cohorts. So, one change that has occurred in recent times in Irish society is that children are less at risk of abuse from authority figures, though more at risk from their peers. This does not sound like particularly good news but it does contain an important – and hopeful – message for us.

Those described as 'authority figures' derive their authority from their positions within institutions such as schools, sports organisations, and, of course, the Church. These are the very institutions that have been wracked over the past thirty years with disclosures of mainly non-recent abuse of children and that have had to change

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their culture and practices to address the crises these disclosures brought about for these institutions. The findings of the CSO survey would suggest that these changes in culture and practice have made a positive impact. This is good news for everyone but it has a particular significance for the Report, which is about tackling the problem of child sexual abuse. It demonstrates that when people come together with real determination and take the appropriate actions it is possible to bring about positive change. If Irish society can make its schools, sports organisations and its faith communities safer places for children, then surely a similar effort can be made with respect to abuse by peers. That, in essence is what this report is all about. It identifies unhelpful perceptions and attitudes that get in the way of us making the changes we need to make in order to make our society a safer place for children.

The Report examines obstacles to the development of a 'whole of society' approach to tackling child sexual abuse and identifies attitudinal barriers such as suppression, denial and silence, and perceptions of the problem as overwhelming and intractable. It calls for a 'National Conversation' on the issue which is empowering and hopeful. We might well ask ourselves what role the Catholic Church in Ireland, with our very troubled history in

this area, has to contribute to such a debate. In the Red C poll people were asked which groups they trusted most to tackle child sexual abuse. Fifty three per cent of those polled identified survivors, 51% survivor support and prevention charities and 49% mental health experts and therapists. At the other end of the spectrum only 2% mentioned big tech companies, 4% religious orders and faith communities, and 5% politicians. Clearly the Church lacks credibility in this area, despite the good work done in implementing good safeguarding practices in our parishes and church organisations.

We practise good safeguarding and child protection because we believe these to be expressions of authentic Christian living and be-

cause we want our children to know the love of God in their own lives. We can also make a contribution to tackling child sexual abuse at a societal level. For instance, we can refuse to contribute to the silence around the issue by acknowledging our past and remembering those who have suffered as a consequence of abuse in childhood. Initiatives such as the annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse are important here and ought to be given more prominence. It is unfortunate that Church bodies are still caught up in arguments about contributions to redress for victims and survivors. As long as that issue remains unresolved, there will be a large question mark of the extent to which the Church has come to terms with its own history in relation to this issue. Redress is important. It forms one part of achieving justice for those who were abused in the past. As well as making restitution for the past, the Church must look to the future and to its responsibility to this generation of young people who are caught up in abusive situations. The Church has resources. It can and should put these resources to good use in the prevention of child sexual abuse and supporting treatment for victims, irrespective of who the perpetrators of abuse are. That would surely send out a message about how seriously the Church takes its responsibilities and wishes to make reparation for the failures of the past. ■

How to get in touch with the CSPS team

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You can call the CSPS team at 01 8360314

Please note: the position of Administrator is vacant at this time. We will endeavour to respond to your queries as soon as possible but we would ask your patience and understanding if it takes us a little longer than usual to respond to your call or message.

Vetting enquiries and applications should be submitted to garda.vetting@dublindiocese.ie

Changes to vetting process

CHANGES TO the vetting process were introduced by the National Vetting Bureau in July of this year as part of a European Union initiative on combating the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. This is a welcome initiative that extends the checks carried on those for whom vetting is being sought (the 'vetting subject') to all 27 EU countries, as well as the UK.

To support these safeguarding enhancements, vetting subjects for roles with children who previously lived in an EU member state or in the UK will now be required to provide more detailed information. To facilitate these changes a new NVB1 form has been designed. All old versions of the NVB1 should now be destroyed as they will no longer be accepted.

As before, vetting subjects must present themselves in

person for verification of identity and address. However, there is a new Identity Document Schedule and only the listed documents are acceptable. Training will be mandatory for all those verifying the identity of vetting subjects. After a period of transition only those persons who have undergone the mandatory training will be permitted to submit documentation to the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service. Further information on this training will be provided in due course. In the meantime, you may continue to submit applications once the new process is followed.

Any change to a familiar system is likely to lead to some confusion and delay, especially in the initial stages. However, with goodwill and patience all round, we will adapt to the new system.

Thank you, Katherine

KATHERINE WARD has left her post as Administrator of CSPS to take up a position with the Dublin Volunteer Centre. Katherine was with us through a period of change and adjustment as we gave up our old 'home' in Clonliffe College and relocated to Arran Quay. Indeed, Katherine's first weeks with CSPS involved very little administration and a lot of putting files into boxes and carrying them down to the basement in Clonliffe. Katherine showed an early willingness to get 'stuck in' and do whatever was required, a very important quality in a member of a small team with multiple responsibilities.

Moving to new offices in Arran Quay marked more than a change of address for CSPS. In Clonliffe

we had our own self-contained space in a very large building. Now we share a much smaller building with colleagues from other offices with whom we are in daily contact. Katherine was our chief networker, putting us in touch with our new colleagues and promoting co-operation between us all.

Katherine will have been known to many readers as the person who most often answered the phone and dealt with queries. She was always friendly and helpful and people appreciated her kindness. We will miss Katherine's cheerful presence and her eagerness to be of assistance.

We are grateful for all her hard work and dedication and we wish her well for the future.



Katherine Ward on the last day of her employment with the Diocese