

“You can’t explain what it does to you...’: Secondary systemic moral injury and the impact on parents/carers of children who have been sexually abused

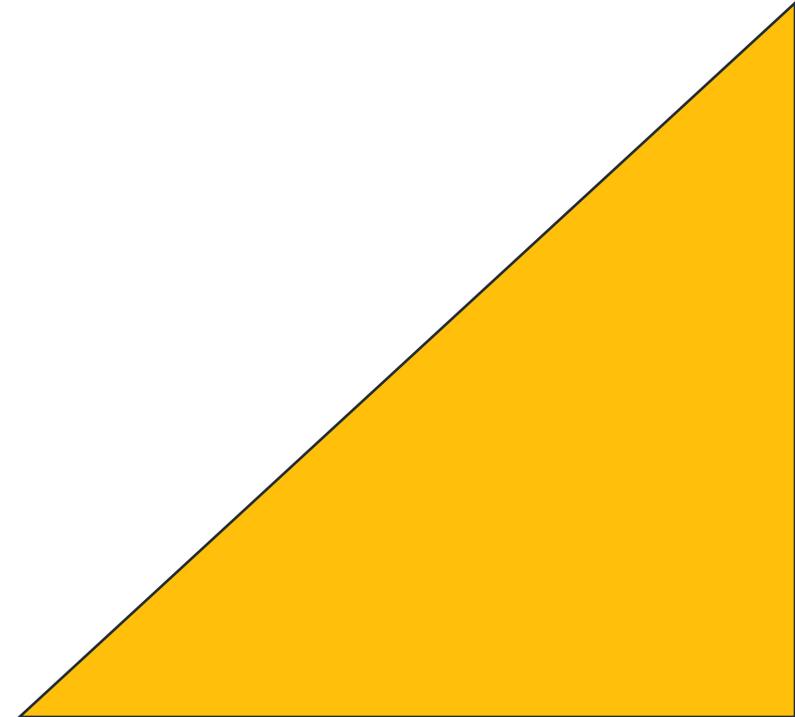
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Contents of Presentation

- Brief Introduction to presenters
- Restitute and who it works with
- The aims of the evaluation
- Key messages from research
- Post disclosure
- The challenge of supporting loved ones
- Systemic harms
- Extending moral injury?
- Hope
- Concluding comments
- Thank Yous



The Presenters

Cath Pickles

- **Founder and CEO of Restitute CIC (Community Interest Company)**
- **Expert by Experience**
- **Carer of an adult survivor of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**
- **Former Primary School Teacher and District Councillor**
- **Developed the term “third party victim of crimes” now used by Ministry of Justice**

Jo Finch

- **Professor of Social Work and PGR**
- **Co-Head, Department of Counselling, Psychology and Social Work**
- **Former social worker, practice educator and play therapist in London**
- **Worked in adults and children & families settings, and in statutory and voluntary sectors**
- **Domestic Abuse, Sexual Crimes and CSA all featured prominently in my work as a social worker**
- **Mostly writes about practice learning in social work and PREVENT**

Who Restitute works with:

- Parent, carers, siblings, and other family members who support children who are survivors of sexual abuse
- Non-abusing partners or children of those arrested for sexual offences against children (including online)
- The loved ones of adults who have survived sexual assault as an adult or who were sexually abused as children
- Family and friends who are supporting someone who has suffered violence, including domestic violence.

Since 2019, supported 478 clients to date:

- 75% of Restitute's clients are third party victims of child sexual abuse
- 13% Domestic Violence
- 7% Sexual Violence against an adult
- 5% Violent Offence

Aims of the evaluation (funded by the CSA unit at The Home Office)

1) Explore the impact and outcomes of the case work and therapeutic services offered in terms of well-being, physical health and parent/carer confidence in the short and longer term.

2) Understanding the characteristics and needs of the individuals and families that come into the service.

3) To consider the longer-term support needs of individuals and families.

4) To consider future service development and funding requirements



Key messages from Research (UK)

1 in 6 girls experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16*

1 in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16*

Estimated that 3.1 million adults had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16, which is around 7.5% of the population ages 8 to 74+

37% under 16s abused by friends, family or acquaintance+

Boys more likely than girls to be abused by a person in a position of trust (16% to 6%)+

40-70% of child sexual abuse occurs within families where domestic violence is presentx

Estimated that 82 to 92% of all CSA offenders are men+^

Girls are 5 times more likely than boys to be sexually abused by step Father (7.5% to 1.4%)+

*Independent Inquiry into CSA (2022)

+ The Office for National Statistics (2020)

^The National Chief Police Council (2024)

x Farmer and Pollock, 1998, Hester and Pearson, 1998)

Focus here on one key finding to merge from the wider evaluation:

- Harm caused by statutory agencies
- Can this be considered another form of moral injury?
- If it is, so what?

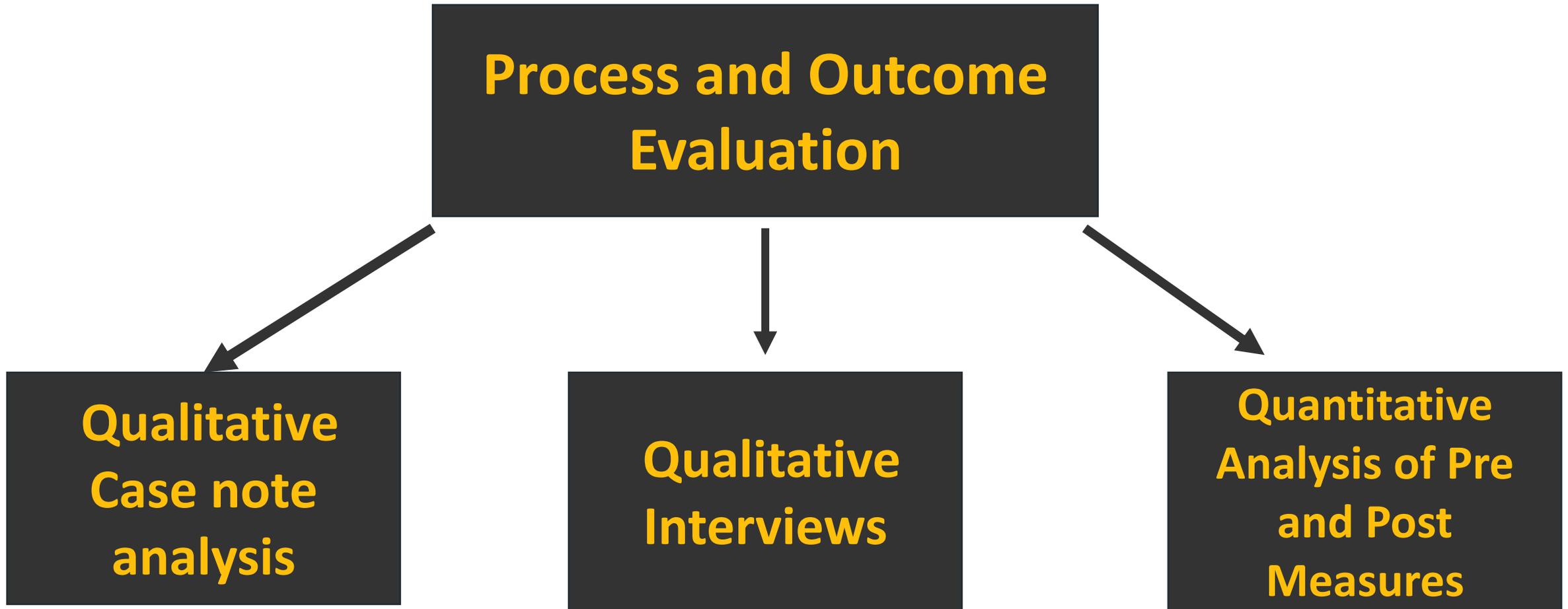
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3) To consider the longer-term support needs of individuals and families.

Perpetrating, failing to prevent or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral values and expectations (Litz et al, 2009)

Moral injury is the emotional, psychological, or spiritual distress that results from actions—or the lack of them—which violate a person's moral or ethical code. It often occurs in high-stakes situations, such as in military, healthcare, or emergency services, where individuals feel they have betrayed their own values.

The Evaluation



The Impact on Parents/Carers post disclosure

Emotional Distress

- Anger and rage
- Guilt
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Despair
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Suicidal ideation
- Grief and loss
- Isolation and loneliness
- Fear
- Shame and stigma

“she was raped at 15 plus all the domestic violence she has suffered and she felt even though she was aware of those sort of situations, she feels guilty that she didn't protect her two girls from a similar situation”

“[name of client] was in an agitated state when we first spoke today. She said she was having daily panic attacks and everything was too much at the moment.”

“I required medication to help with my anxiety and sleep. I battled with anxiety and suicidal ideation for months afterwards”

“I feel so lonely and isolated”

“ [name of client] still feels a sense of guilt around what has happened as well as shame,

The Challenges of Supporting Loved ones

Internalising behaviours

Externalising behaviours

Loss of friends

Isolation

Vulnerability to further victimisation

Poor mental and physical health

Daughter still self harms and has cuts on her arms and neck and legs. She is also on the anorexic spectrum and never eats with family . She weighs about 6 stone but GP says her weight is consistent so won't refer her”.

“[name of client] has had a bad week. Daughter punched the wall and they ended up in hospital all weds night. thankfully nothing broken but client) is concerned that daughter’s behaviour is getting worse”.

“Currently she [daughter] is at great risk of negative influence, exploitation, experimenting with drink and tobacco or other risky behaviours

Systemic Harms

- Poor professional response post disclosure
- Delayed criminal justice proceedings
- Lack of charging decisions
- Feeling under suspicion from social workers
- Schools or colleges not understanding the needs of loved one (primary victim)
- Primary and Third Party victims not meeting criteria for support services and service limited in duration and scope
- Not being believed

“She [client] said that Police had taken the case to CPS 5 times but each time the note came back NFA as they couldn't guarantee a conviction”

“They [police] just don't see it, they've become so conditioned to the role that what they are doing, they are losing sight of the victim..... I felt really let down and the hurt that causes...”

“We felt like we were under investigation the whole time, everything we said was criticised, everything we did was criticised and we were like, hang on, we had no idea this was happening and we've brought the children into a safe space . And you actually feel like you're against us, not working with us”.

Extending Moral Injury?

- Violation of someone's moral or ethical code (perpetrators often known to families)
- CSA disrupts mothering/parenting discourses – i.e. you must protect your child
- Good enough parents who have never had experience of police / social care and have expectations about what will happen next.
- Challenges deeply held notions of the “others”
- Witnessing poor professional practice – violation of previously held values and beliefs
- Loss of trust and faith in own abilities to make judgments
- Parents/cares having to manage or engage in poor or ineffective services which might further harm their loved ones?

Hope?

- Evidence in data of life getting better for parents/carers other family members and the loved one
- The casework service is offering a cost effective, flexible but sophisticated intervention, incorporating a range of approaches.
- The data evidenced celebration of clients achievements.
- This sophisticated service, alongside the careful use of lived experience, helps clients and indirectly their loved one.

“[name of client] said that it was lovely to actually see how far she had progressed. She said "I forget where I was and to have that visual picture of progress is really encouraging. It really put a smile on my face.”

Hope

“Thank you Restitute, your much needed, invaluable support over the last year has been everything I needed to manage my caring role and reclaim my coping skills. I will be forever grateful.”

“Hearing from a professional that my son and I will get through this difficult and traumatic time and that there are brighter and happier times ahead mean so much to us.”

“[name of client] said that it was lovely to actually see how far she had progressed. She said "I forget where I was and to have that visual picture of progress is really encouraging. It really put a smile on my face.”

Concluding Comments

1. Restitute set up to fill a gap – that of supporting third party victims of CSA and other violent crimes
2. In supporting parents and carers, indirectly support the primary victim and prepare them for potentially difficult times ahead
3. Concept of primary and secondary harms
4. ...and these harms can be considered to cause moral injury for parents and carers of lived ones who have survived CSA

MI so what?...

- Recognition of the primary and secondary traumas experienced
- Helps explain some of the intense feelings of shame and guilt...
- ..alongside poor physical and mental health of parents/carers.
- May assist professionals supporting parents and carers with more compassion

Thanks Yous



Heartfelt thank you to Restitute's clients, who agreed to share data and to those that participated in interviews with me.

Thank you to the Home office for providing the funds for this evaluation

Thank you to Restitute for recognising the importance of the evaluation and being so open to scrutiny by an academic



link to evaluation report

[Restitute-UOS-Report.pdf](#)

Thank you to
listening and
please take care of
yourselves

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