

Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings public hearing - one page summary

This investigation will examine how religious organisations keep children safe from sexual abuse and respond to allegations. It will not just look at policies, but the cultures within organisations and any potential barriers to responding effectively to abuse.

The Inquiry has separate investigations into the two largest religious groups in the country; the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. Therefore, this investigation will examine a wide range of other religious organisations with a significant presence in England and Wales. There are, for example, around 2.7 million Muslims, making up 5 percent of the population. In the 2011 census, there were around 800,000 Hindus in England, 420,000 Sikhs, 238,000 Buddhists and 261,000 Jews.

We know that religious organisations play an important, positive role in many people's lives. But we also know that some individuals use them as a way to access children without suspicion being aroused. In some cases, they groom and abuse children in those settings. The power and influence of those in positions of religious leadership can lead to children being silenced or ignored.

Data from Operation Hydrant shows that 11 percent of investigations into non-recent child sexual abuse involve a religious organisation or setting. Earlier this month, an evangelical pastor was convicted of sexually abusing six boys and a girl over a 20 year period in Birmingham. Michael Oluronbi used spiritual work as a subterfuge for sexual abuse, administering holy baths which he said would cleanse them. None of his victims told anyone as a child.

In some religious settings, there are barriers to dealing with child sexual abuse which many would not even consider. For example, there are no Tamil words for child sexual abuse. This can deter disclosures and dialogue, according to the group Abuse Never Becomes Us. Elsewhere, the Muslim Women's Network says there can be a fear in the Muslim community to report abuse as it could fuel Islamophobia.

In some areas of Judaism, there have been concerns about not reporting outside the organisation. In some cases, the concept of mesirah - one Jew reporting the conduct of another Jew to a non rabbinical authority under circumstances forbidden by rabbinic law - has been used to encourage people not to report child sexual abuse.

During this two week hearing, the Inquiry will take evidence from victims and survivors of abuse, religious organisations, local authorities, charities, central government and third sector bodies who provide training and support.

Some of the issues to be examined include:

- Training, and the understanding of child sexual abuse;
- Policies and procedures;
- Vetting and barring;
- Arrangements in place to respond to allegations of abuse, including pastoral support;
- Internal processes for auditing, inspection or oversight of child protection.