

Reclaiming sexual empowerment after surviving childhood sexual abuse from the perspective of therapists in private practice in Ireland

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Concepts

Childhood Sexual Abuse:

Is the involvement of a child in sexual activity with an adult/other child in a position of trust, power, or responsibility, which is for the sexual gratification of the other person (World Health Organization, (1999); Gewirtz-Meydon & Fir-Lovee, (2021)).

Sexuality:

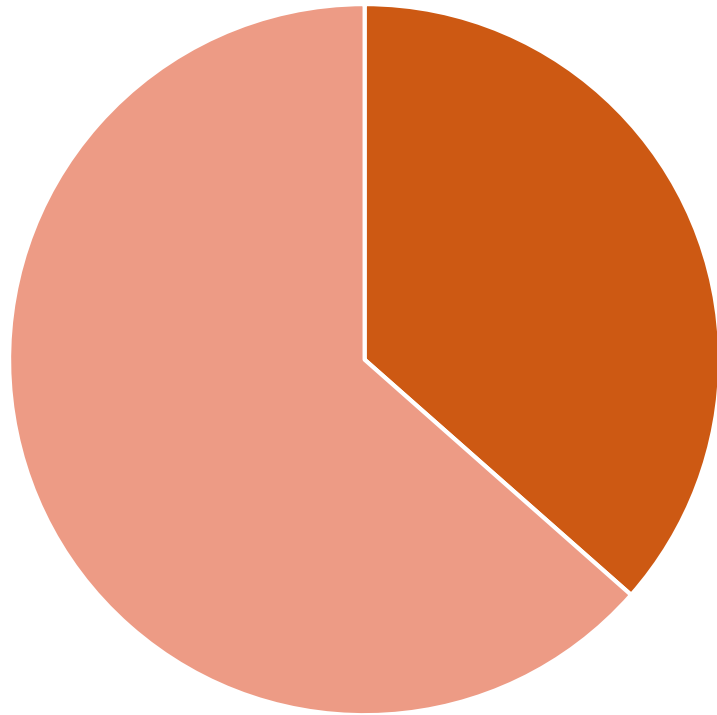
Our sexualities, sexual preferences, and sexual experiences determine who we are (Hawkins, Cornwall & Lewin, 2011)

Sexual Empowerment:

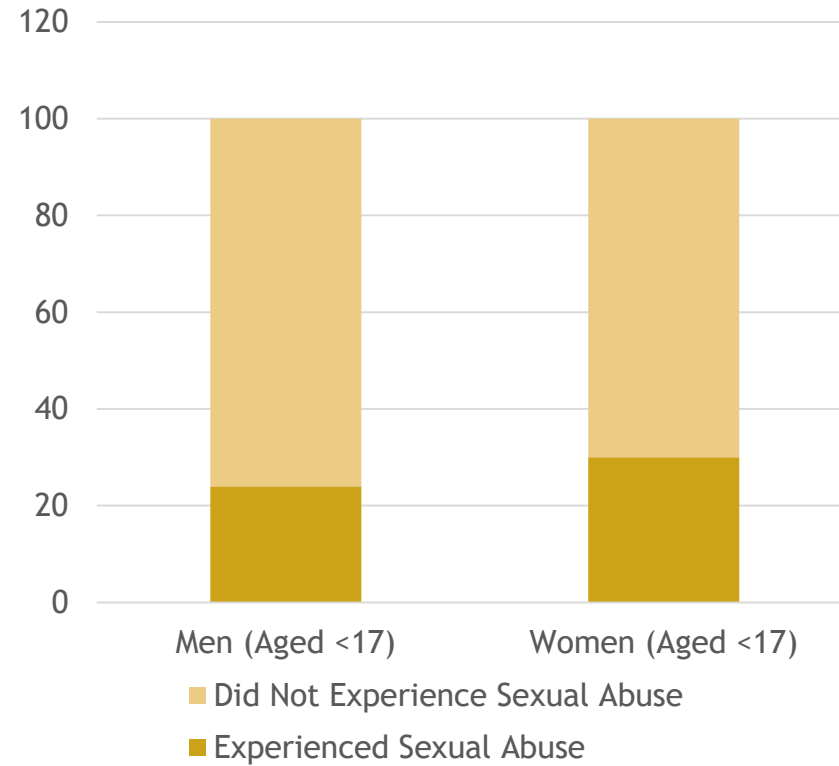
Aims to increase people's confidence in their ability to exercise personal agency and engage in safer sexual activities

(Hightow-Weidman et al., 2018).

Statistics



■ Religious/Clerical Abuse ■ Familial/Ex-familial abuse



Aims

- ▶ What are the barriers for survivors of CSA,
- ▶ In reclaiming their sexual empowerment in a therapeutic setting
- ▶ From the lens of therapists in private practice in Ireland.

Objectives

- ▶ To gain an understanding of how CSA impacts survivors' sexuality.
- ▶ To examine what the barriers and benefits for survivors in reclaiming their sexual empowerment in a therapeutic setting.
- ▶ To explore what are the barriers and benefits for therapists in helping survivors, reclaim their sexual empowerment.
- ▶ To establish if reclaiming their sexual empowerment is important to survivors, and their recovery process?
- ▶ To determine what meaning survivors, make of reclaiming their sexual empowerment after surviving CSA.



Methodology



Opted for a qualitative methodology
(Prosman, Lo Fo Wong, and Lagro-Janssen 2013)



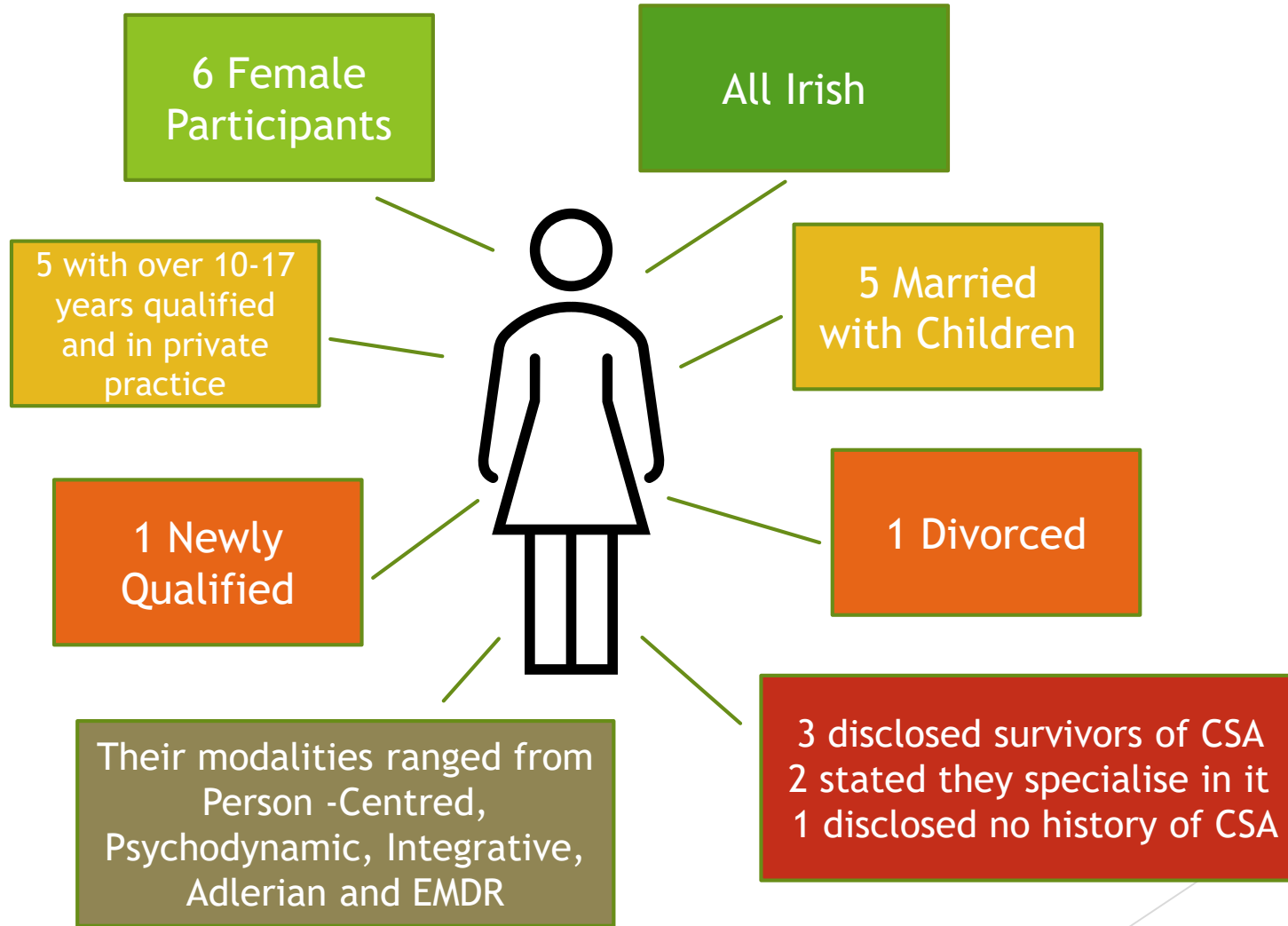
The data was analysed by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) *(Oxley, 2016)*



Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews *(Oxley, 2016)*



Interviews



“ultimately I think when children are sexually abused, it’s not just sexual abuse, it’s nearly the rape of their soul...because of the long term impact and the damage that it does to their whole psyche”

- Pt. C.

Themes

Theme 1

Impact on Sexuality

- Differences

Theme 2

The Irish Culture

- It's a taboo.
- Can't talk about it.
- Religion.

Theme 3

The Irish Therapist

- Can't talk about it.
- Inexperienced
- Biases & judgement

Theme 4

The Irish Training

- Gap in training.
- Specialized training.

Theme 5

Meaning Making

- Is RSE important to clients?

Theme 1 - The Impact on Sexuality

Yes

"thinking about my own experience of childhood sexual abuse, I'd say that it definitely, can make things a lot more difficult for you in life....my view of sex and sexuality.... was very skewed" Pt. L.

"if they are male and they've been sexually abused by another man....they often wonder is that because...is that why I'm gay.... it's very normal to be confused anyway about sexuality but it's actually heart breaking....in a very complex way" Pt. C.

there's a real prevalence of increase in sexual acting out and the use of pornography...for the female clients that I have, their experiences of sexual abuse... they have detached from their sexual self" Pt. O.

No

"Sometimes it doesn't impact a person's sexuality. Sometimes it does. Many people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have very healthy sexual relationships and a very healthy relationship with their sexuality" Pt. H.



Theme 2 - The Irish Culture

It's a Taboo

"It is to do with culture but there is a whole taboo about sex still. There is a taboo about anything to do with sex and I think child abuse is one of those things"

- Pt. S.

Can't Talk About It

"Irish people aren't good about talking about sex and relationships. We don't even talk about pornography so there's a huge cultural barrier"

- Pt. O

Religious Background

"I come from a very strict Catholic background... being an Irish citizen... there's a lot of shame around sexuality"

- Pt. L.

Theme 3 - The Irish Therapist

Can't Talk About It

“Nobody talks about sex in this country, that transfers into the professional world.... it is still a subject that is very difficult for people to broach”

- Pt. S

Inexperienced

“worry about saying the wrong thing, when people disclose, obviously protocols are in place...the energy in the room when you're talking... so horrific nearly envelopes you sometimes...”

- Pt. C

Bias/Judgements

“My biggest problem with therapists in Ireland, is most of them haven't done enough work on themselves at all”

- Pt. L



Theme 4 - The Irish Training

Lack of Training

“You can’t study sex therapy in Ireland. There is nowhere to study it....should be mandatory across the colleges. It should be at least minimum one module”

- Pt. S

“a lot of therapists are not equipped. The training is absolutely shite in this country....the trainings are not covering it effectively”

- Pt. L

Specialised Training

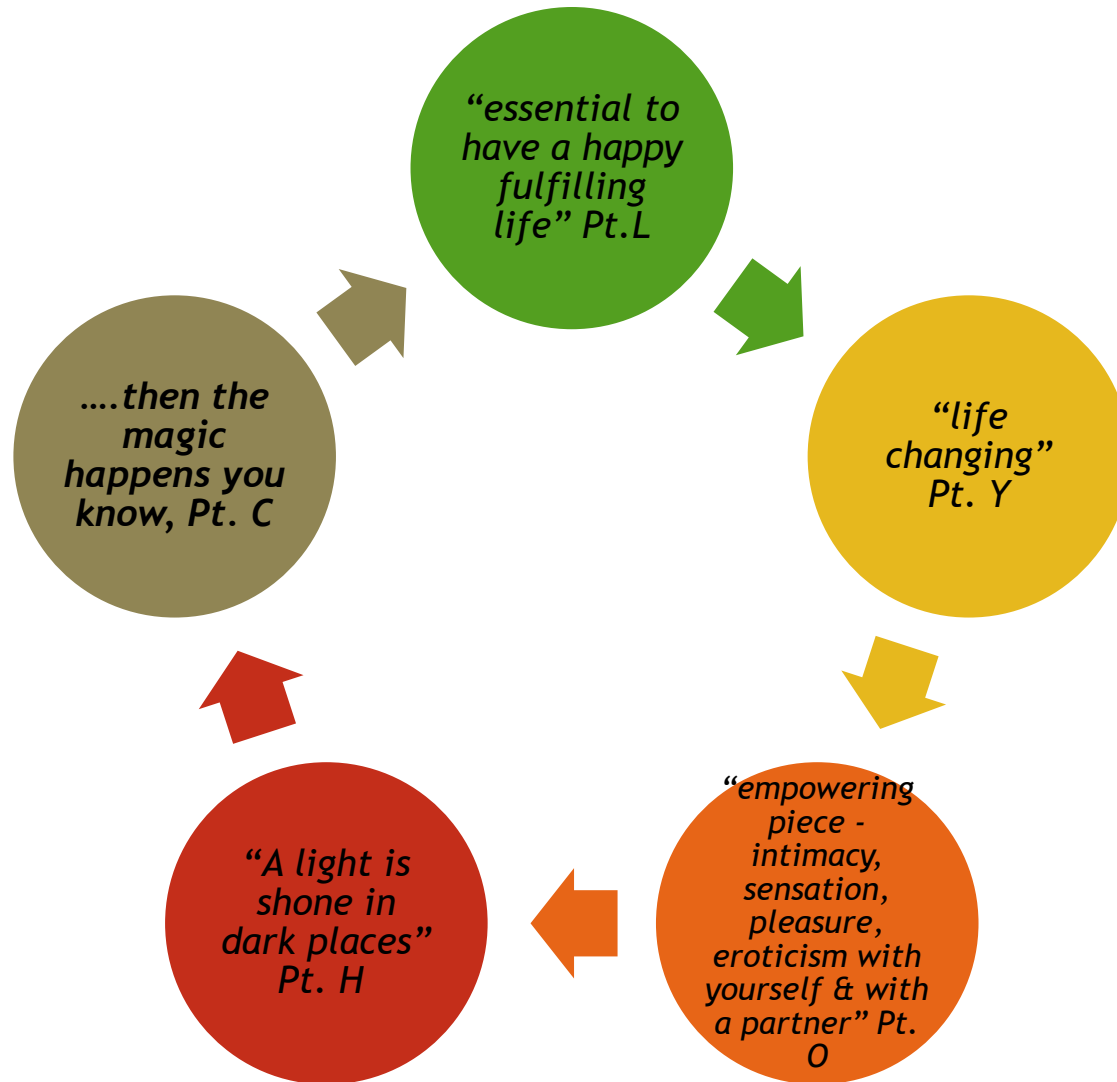
“I did the training for the Rape Crisis Centre... it was amazing, it was excellent training, three months”

- Pt. C

“Most therapists are going to the UK, I’ve gone to the UK for some of my training because its just not available here, so that’s a huge barrier”

- Pt. O

Theme 5 - Meaning Making



Clinical Considerations for Practice

- ▶ Discussing sex and sexuality in therapy is typically challenging and complex for both clients and therapists (Love & Faber, 2017).
- ▶ Therapists can play a crucial role in assisting survivors understand sexual difficulties in creative and positive ways by being educated on sexual abuse and sexual healing practice (Bigras, Vaillancourt-Morel , Nolin & Bergeron, 2020).
- ▶ Cooper and McLeod suggest therapists create and develop an integrative approach to therapy that builds on existing models of therapy, which would suit the needs of different clients, at different times, but favouring no particular model over another (McLeod, 2018).

Strengths & Limitations

No male voice in interviews

Small sample size

Survivor participants

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- ▶ This research is dedicated to my Great Aunt Peggy.
- ▶ *May my ancestors of CSA be at peace from their unspoken wounds.*

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