

**Survivors at the Centre? Learnings from Survivor Epistemology Operating in a
Public Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

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Abstract

Victims and survivors of Child Sexual Abuse have campaigned for public inquiries as a mechanism to deliver justice for decades. Participatory experiences thus far have varied, reflecting difficulties inquiries have faced in understanding how they can incorporate the emotional and ethical habitus of victims and survivors into their structures and processes. Some recent inquiries have taken significant steps towards cultivating a psychological culture whereby the justice needs of victims and survivors include the incorporation of their domains of knowledge into the inquiry. This thesis reports on Participatory Action Research (PAR) undertaken with members of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP) of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The project was conducted with the VSCP to document and understand their experiences of working within the inquiry. It identified that survivor epistemology aligned with IICSA, particularly when incorporating emotionality into the design of processes and being a conduit between the Inquiry and external victim and survivor stakeholders. However, survivor epistemology frequently misaligned with the culture, knowledge production, and practices of civil service administration and legal professions. This was compounded by a level of uncertainty surrounding roles, responsibilities, and approaches to working practices. This research provides useful contributions in understanding whether victim and survivor centric aspects of transitional justice mechanisms can be achieved within the legalistic field of public inquiries. Thesis findings suggest that future inquiries would benefit from clearly defining the roles with victim and survivors prior to their appointment, recognising and incorporating the victim and survivor skillset, and anticipating power-agency differences, which may significantly impact the experiences of victims and survivors.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis was completed by the author. This thesis submission was produced solely for the Clinical Psychology Doctorate programme at the University of Essex. Apart from where it describes by reference or acknowledgment, this work has been solely created by the author.

Hannah Griffin

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

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1. Background

1.1. The History of Public Inquiries into Child Sexual Abuse

Public inquiries into child abuse and institutional failings to protect children from harm are a key governance tool across Western nations. They are driven by public moral outrage after media coverage, and activism from Victims and Survivors (VS) and feminist groups campaigning for justice (Daly, 2014). They focus on understanding the extent of harm inflicted on children and widespread attempts to cover-up abuse by those in organisations and positions of power (Swain, 2018; Wright, 2017). The development of child protection laws and rights following an increase in child abuse inquiries conducted from the 1980s onwards have helped (Swain et al., 2018). Internationally, inquiries investigating Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), more specifically, and institutional failings to protect children have been notable from the 1990s (Colton et al., 2002), with many non-statutory inquiries looking at open institutions such as religious organisations. In recent years, larger public inquiries investigating CSA across institutions have been undertaken internationally, in Germany, New Zealand Australia, Jersey, and England and Wales, indicating the global scale of abuse (Wright et al, 2020).

Defined by practises and mechanisms designed to examine the impact of large-scale abuse to individuals in society, transitional justice and its processes aim to ensure justice by delivering acknowledgement and accountability, and achieving reconciliation (Gallen, 2023). Mechanisms aim to be VS-centric, truth-seeking, and explore a range of reparations and redress. Public inquiries investigating non-recent child abuse can be an interpretation of transitional justice mechanism.

Public inquiries investigating non-recent child abuse across open and closed institutional contexts are shaped by terms of reference, which focus parameters of investigation. They transparently document findings (Swain et al., 2018; Wright, 2017). Inquiries aim to examine systemic failings, hearing what happened from VS, investigating crimes across substantial

time periods, and determining recommendations to better safeguard children through improved policies (Wright, 2017). In highlighting wrongdoing, through the establishment of facts and blame, inquiries operate to learn lessons and limit future replication of harm. They are adjunct but separate to government and have a particular advisory capacity on key social and legislative matters. Larger commissions of inquiry, such as IICSA and the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, investigated institutional CSA with statutory powers (Gleeson & Ring, 2017; Wright, 2017). These powers compelled witnesses to provide evidence. Public inquiries are thus one aspect of a wider governmental response to provide reparations and justice for VS (Naylor & McAlinden, 2016; Wright, 2017), with responses including public apologies, financial compensation through redress schemes and memorialisation (Daly, 2014; Sköld and Swain, 2015).

1.2. The Aftermath of Child Sexual Abuse: Private and Public Healing Processes

In recent years, research has indicated that approximately one in six girls and one in twenty boys experience sexual abuse in England and Wales before the age of sixteen (IICSA, 2022). Further public body statistics indicate that approximately 3.1 million adults in England and Wales were estimated to have experienced CSA before 16 years old as of March 2020 (ONS, 2021). The volume of reported CSA demonstrates the pervasiveness and insidiousness of harm inflicted on VS. It signifies the crime as an endemic social problem, highlighting grave institutional failings to protect children. Yet, the reality of CSA is often denied or minimised. Recognising the reality and extent of CSA is confronting for individuals. It emphasises the possibility that trusted people and institutions can perpetuate this crime against children, and collectively threatens our sense of security and trust (Beckett, 1996). As such, it is a disturbing reality for individuals to face. It becomes unbearable and unthinkable, and instead its reality is often obscured.

CSA has a profound effect on individuals. VS of CSA frequently report difficulties associated with the diagnostic criteria of Complex Trauma, or Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD). Difficulties can include experiences of flashbacks, nightmares, loneliness, dissociation, numbness or emptiness, significant distress associated with negative self-evaluation, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety (Stubley & Young, 2021; Whitelock, Lamb, & Renfrow, 2013), particularly around close relationships and attachments (Karatzias et al., 2017; Stubley & Young, 2021). The betrayal of trust which occurs because of CSA, means VS must grapple with a loss of faith in a safe environment, particularly if perpetrator(s) are family members, or if following disclosure, abuse is ignored or denied (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020). Intrapsychically, the impact of silencing and denial can mean individuals find it difficult to identify or express emotional responses to their experiences (Hunter, 2010). Consequently, VS may adopt coping strategies to survive the psychosocial effects of CSA (Reavey & Gough, 2000).

The therapeutic discourse around CSA has increasingly depicted the intersubjective dynamic between the personal impact of traumatic experiences, and the social alienation that occurs in the aftermath of experiencing CSA (Herman, 1992; McPhillips et al., 2020; Whittier, 2009; Wright, 2008). The process of making sense of trauma, particularly abuse, can be acutely painful. Emotional and physical pain associated with abuse and neglect gets expressed by VS variously in attempts to let a caregiver know, with hope that they recognise and respond to their needs (Hunter, 2010; Sagi, 2021). However, accompanying this, narratives and efforts employed by perpetrators to deny, silence, and suppress discovery of abuse, can often result in shame, guilt, and self-blame of VS (Newsom & Myers Bowman, 2017). This often gets reinforced by social narratives and institutional structures, such as family, schoolteachers, and social care staff, who turn a blind eye to disclosures or when help was sought (Hunter, 2010; Lev-Weisel, 2015). Considering this, the impact of CSA, the experiences of fear, terror, pain, and betrayal, are often compounded by subsequent social marginalisation and stigma (Buchbinder & Sinay, 2020).

As such, VS are tasked with forming safe, trusting relational bonds with primary caregivers who are untrustworthy, through their negligence, or unpredictability and dangerousness (Herman, 1992). Thus, when coping strategies or help-seeking have been dismissed, chastised, or viewed negatively by adults in caring positions, a traumatic shame ensues (Moran & Salter, 2022; Salter, 2020). Characterised by social isolation, self-blame, and negative self-evaluation, traumatic shame frequently manifests in the aftermath of CSA (Newsom & Myers-Bowman, 2017). This can leave VS struggling to feel worthy, both as a person and as someone that needs or deserves care. It can also heighten unwanted feelings of helplessness and anxiety, particularly when people in authority, or circumstances require them to assert their needs or wishes (Reavey & Gough, 2000). As such, conflicting dilemmas can occur, often navigated by attempts to minimise and avoid internal and external reminders of traumatic experiences, coexisting alongside feelings of loneliness and the longing for social connection.

CSA is a pervasive social problem, yet, as public inquiries highlight, institutional failures mean that it is often left for VS to recover from the pain inflicted (Wright, 2016). This healing can take many forms, both public and private. In terms of private healing, this may mean processing traumatic events in therapeutic spaces, aiming to transcend and integrate traumatic and emotional experiences, narratives, and aspects of the self (Herman, 1992; Stubble & Young, 2021). This, alongside rebuilding social connection and trusting relationships, can be crucial for individuals to overcome the profound isolation that can often occur. Public healing for VS, therefore, can include reconnection with others and the social world through various means. For many VS the process of 'coming out' as a survivor of CSA creates reconnection and belonging, perhaps through joining a peer collective or social movement (Herman, 1992; Whittier, 2009). Being among others with a shared experience can aid in the dislocation of traumatic shame for VS. It can shift a highly painful aspect of a VS' identity from the private to the public sphere and in doing so foster agency, connection, and increasing self-worth (Herman, 2023; Whittier, 2012).

Clinical trauma specialists (Stubley & Young, 2021) and social theorists (Wright, 2017) acknowledge this private-public shift required following the aftermath of CSA. Private healing is important, but it exists in a therapeutic culture which can locate the problem within the individual (Wright, 2016). Thus, recognising the psychosocial harm inflicted in 'what's happened to you' narratives is a crucial part of healing, but is insufficient to heal the profound sense of injustice experienced by VS (Stubley & Taggart, 2022). Trauma specialists and activists increasingly argue that psychotherapeutic and allied health professions who work with VS need to consider further steps to redress the individualising onus imbuing the healing process for VS (Herman, 2023; McPhillips et al., 2020). Advocacy and public acknowledgement that CSA and trauma are inseparable from socio-political context, are important steps in this process.

1.3. Public Healing, Activism, and Participation - *A Reparative Tool in Seeking Justice?*

Recognition of the social harm of CSA and trauma, amplified by mass media, and investigated by public inquiries and commissions, are regularly driven and scaffolded by VS collectives vocalising injustice, pain, and lasting impact (Lundy, 2020; Sköld & Swain, 2018; Wright & Henry, 2019). In this way, VS individually and collectively express the emotional impact of their abuse and failures of governments to respond. Reclaiming emotional expression can be seen as an empowering personal and political response which is effective in lobbying public bodies for change (Gallen, 2023; Moran & Salter, 2022; Whittier, 2009). VS advocacy around prevention and protection against CSA, is rooted in the power of emotion and collective calls for action (Gallen, 2023; Henry, Wright & Moran, 2022; Whittier, 2012). Collective VS groups seek to mobilise through many tools, such as social/mass media (Wright & Henry, 2019; Wright, 2017), providing platforms to express outrage and shame individuals and institutions into change by bringing past actions into public domains (Gallen, 2023; Wright & Henry, 2019). Thus, as Stein (2011) depicts, public expressions of

anguish, outrage, anger, and previously held shame, are powerful mechanisms, central to success in mobilising governing bodies to investigate and act.

VS advocacy collectives have been active throughout public inquiries. They have offered submissions to inquiries collectively and individually (Henry, Wright & Moran, 2022), been involved in initial consultation processes (Hamber & Lundy, 2020), appointed as a VS consultative and advisory panel (Barker et al., 2023a), lobbied governments and inquiries for policy and care reform (Lundy, 2024; Wright & Henry, 2019), and been influential in shaping redress procedures (Lundy, 2019). Following the conclusion of a public inquiry, VS groups continue in consultation committees exploring policy reforms and implementation (Henry, Wright & Moran, 2022). The importance of VS advocacy and activism at public inquiries therefore cannot be ignored as a powerful vehicle for social change, with a crucial function both outside and inside public bodies and public inquiries (Wright & Henry, 2019).

Public inquiries and commissions investigating CSA are interested in uncovering responsibility, how this may have been covered up, and how wrongs can be publicly redressed for VS. Thus, the process of truth recovery is paramount to justice for VS (McAlinden, 2013). Finding 'truth' and bringing justice to the VS who were repeatedly failed is a vital mechanism of inquiries (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). Another central aim for VS activists and advocacy groups is to raise awareness around child abuse generally, and CSA in particular (Lundy, 2020; Wright, 2017; Wright & Swain, 2021). Advocacy groups have recognised that to accomplish truth recovery, using the powers of public inquiries can be necessary as a vehicle to aid in the process, with the hope of generating new policies, public, and criminal accountability (Wright & Swain, 2021). In doing so, inquiries can challenge the pervasive silencing which has engulfed families and institutions and aid recognition of the extent to which this is a pervasive social problem.

VS participation in public inquiries and commissions initially developed in the 1970s and 1980s through using personal testimony in Truth commissions in Uganda and Latin American countries following abusive dictatorships (Wyles et al., 2022). Truth commissions

aimed to hear directly from those affected in efforts to reach truth and justice. The process centred on listening to the experiences and recognising the stories of VS of the regimes, in efforts to heal. It recognised the powerfulness of using testimony to share personal trauma faced and locate it in the context of political tyranny (Devitt, 2009). Recording of individual experiences ensured that through documentation, harms inflicted would not be forgotten by the nation (Humphrey, 2003). Thus, testimony used in this way, as in public commissions, aimed to be a transitional space (McPhillips et al., 2020): both a healing act and a political tool, locating traumatic harm and experiences for VS elsewhere, on responsible individuals and the state (Wyles et al., 2022). It therefore aimed to be a mechanism for therapeutic justice for VS (Doak & Taylor, 2013).

Over time, public inquiries have aligned in some ways with truth commissions as mechanisms to deliver justice. Inquiry structures were revisited, focusing on centralising the voices and testimony of VS (Swain, 2018; Wright, 2017). They, like truth commissions internationally, moved away from an 'expert'-driven investigation model, to centralise VS testimony in the quest for truth, aiming to provide a focus on healing and transitional justice in the public sphere (McAlinden, 2013). Multiple models of private and public hearings have been used since, in public inquiries and redress schemes, to listen to VS experiences, gain insight and understand events, directly hear the extent of traumatic harm caused, and understand their justice aims (Gallen, 2023; Swain et al., 2018).

There are a diverse array of priorities and aims for VS relating to healing and justice interests. These outcomes can both align and diverge, and may be influenced by the context surrounding their abuse, and their subjective healing process (Koss, 2010). Thus, differentiating out justice-related aims and interests, and therapeutic priorities, tied to healing outcomes, must be considered to fully understand the diversity of both justice-related and psychosocial expectations (Daly, 2017). Daly (2017) stipulates that measures of efficacy in relation to justice mechanisms, such as public inquiries, "should not focus on the measures of satisfaction alone, but assessed against the construct of victims' justice interests" (p108).

Crucial elements contributing to VS sense of justice can pertain to active participation in such justice mechanisms. This includes testimonial contributions, shaping the infrastructure, voting or having a say across redress schemes, to be kept informed, and ensuring understanding of how inquiry processes work as mechanisms of justice (Daly, 2017). Justice motivations crucially include the need for acknowledgment through legal and public processes. This includes both validation, a sense of recognition and belief about the abuse from the state, and vindication for VS, by holding those responsible accountable, exposure of the crimes publicly, and a condemnation of the widespread harms inflicted on VS (Daly, 2017; Herman, 2005). However, both conceptual definitions of justice interests among researchers, and which justice motivations and outcomes get prioritised differs among VS across research (Clark, 2015; Daly, 2017; Herman, 2005; Lundy, 2020). Several VS align with more judicial and bureaucratic processes of wanting criminal sentencing as a prioritised outcome for offending individuals (Lundy, 2020); whereas other VS prioritise implementation of specialist support services, and others seek public exposure and degradation of those responsible instead of criminal processes (Herman, 2005). It therefore paints a nuanced picture of, at times, competing needs and interests for VS.

Originally aimed as a therapeutic tool by psychotherapists working with torture survivors (Devitt, 2009), participating in public inquiries via testimonial processes can be characterised as a mixed experience. Widely described as necessary, VS recall experiences of public and private testimonial processes as powerful, and helpful (Barker et al., 2023a; Moran & Salter, 2022), but also as fraught for many VS of CSA (Colton et al., 2002). VS' testimonial participation in public inquiries has been described as a conflicting and often retraumatising experience (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). The formal and ritualistic environment favours the "closed system of communication dominated by legal professionals" (McAlinden & Naylor, 2016, p6). This can lead to "suppressing individual narrative autonomy" (Doak & Naylor, 2013, p41) for VS. Narrative autonomy when bearing witness processes is identified as critical for trauma VS' giving voice, providing them with

acknowledgment (Wyles et al., 2023). Thus, rigid structures in statutory hearings could leave less space for VS to publicly articulate what delivery of justice may look like for them, which might include a strong emphasis on psychological and social restorative aspects of justice (McAlinden & Naylor, 2016). More recently, inquiries have sought to consult cross-sections of VS groups to understand their justice, social, and psychological motivations and needs (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). A new shift across public inquiries in England and Wales and Germany, aims to improve and centre the experiences on VS, by embedding a consultative panel of VS (IICSA, 2023). Their expertise and guidance across inquiry structures and processes (Barker et al., 2023a) may lead to a new model of participation, which could help incorporate a trauma-informed culture in bureaucratic organisations.

There is less understanding of the experiences of 'insider' lived-experience consultants and their diverse role within public inquiries. However, experiences of integrating personal, political, and professional expertise for VS of interpersonal trauma have been growing across public health and social care statutory and third sector organisations (Wilson & Goodman, 2021). Organisational culture can result in tension and containment for VS who provide expertise from within an organisation. Recent inquiries at IICSA and The Australian Royal Commission focused on the importance of adopting shame-sensitive (Moran & Salter, 2022) and Trauma-Informed approaches (Barker et al., 2023) - cultures which reflect VS needs and support staff experiences. Slattery & Goodman (2009) identified organisational factors influencing the experience of working as survivor-advocates across domestic violence organisations. Alongside social support, supervision, and workload, mutuality and agency - shared power - was identified as central to their experience. This was characterised by perceptions of whether the organisation promoted the survivor-advocates' autonomy and followed an egalitarian, non-hierarchical structure, and were crucial factors in protecting against secondary experiences of trauma for survivor-advocates and across the organisation (Wilson & Goodman, 2021). Thus, understanding how VS are recognised for their unique expertise within an organisation such as a public inquiry feels important. Further, how

mutuality and agency can operate in a setting that relies on hierarchical rules and structures as part of their governance requires investigation.

As stated, private and public healing processes of VS of non-recent CSA encourage the processing and expression of emotions, connection, empowerment, and agency (Herman, 1992; 2023). There are also multifaceted roles and dynamics VS undertake, navigate, and resist as part of survivorship personally and politically in public spaces. The question is, when VS participate in public inquiries, are their emotional and ethical predispositions and expectations, considered, adapted, and encouraged, and how does this align or conflict with the legal frameworks and bureaucratic processes that scaffold a public inquiry? A theoretical underpinning of Bourdieu's (1991; 2000) notion of habitus will be drawn upon, highlighting the VS' dispositions, beliefs, and interactions with structures and dynamics of capital and power at a public inquiry. This could offer a useful way of understanding the varied moral and emotional components influencing participatory experiences at a public inquiry.

2. Systematic Literature Review

Victim and Survivor Habitus: Understanding the Emotional and Ethical Milieu in the Field of Inquiries

2.1. Rationale and Aims of the Research Synthesis

The aim of this research synthesis is to perform a meta-ethnographic analysis of the literature examining which factors are salient in contributing to the experiences and processes for VS of non-recent child abuse participating at public inquiry or inquiry-like investigations, and perspectives of Inquiry staff who worked alongside them. There has been limited synthesised understanding of VS participation across public inquiries into non-recent child abuse. This, therefore, will address a gap and aims to aid understanding of what VS characterise as facilitative or barriers to their participatory experience.

This meta-ethnography aims to provide insights into the motivations, values, and experiences of participation across several participatory platforms (public, private, consultatory, and redress panel). The aim is to develop conceptual understanding of what meanings VS ascribe to their experiences, and what factors influence these experiences for VS. Supplementing this, staff reflections can also provide useful insights into how such experiences align and diverge, and what the effects of this are for VS. The final objective of this analysis is identifying implications for staff and organisations to imbue processes and cultures to facilitate meaningful, safe engagement for VS.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1. Design

A meta-ethnographical approach was determined as suitable to synthesise research studies exploring the participatory experiences of adult VS of non-recent child abuse at public inquiries, supplemented by perceptions of inquiry staff. This approach was considered

a suitable choice of qualitative synthesis, as it encourages the development of analysis by methodically examining and synthesizing data generated from the selected studies. A complete analysis requires a re-interpretation of concepts and the data, rather than a descriptive thematic approach that is offered by other qualitative syntheses (Sattar et al., 2021). For a thorough analysis, sample sizes range between three to 77 (France et al., 2014), having expanded from the original guidance proposing a sample ranging from examination of two to six studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The design of this qualitative synthesis obtains aspects across selected research studies. It explores each research theme, practices, and approach to analysis, and collates parts, to uncover a new picture which generates a novel collective whole (Noblit and Hare, 1988). It achieves this by conducting a seven-stage iterative review: getting started – identifying an interest; deciding what is relevant to the initial interest; reading the studies; determining how the studies are related; translating the studies into one another; synthesising translations; expressing the synthesis.

2.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if their participants were adult VS of child abuse or inquiry staff over 18 years. Additionally, articles were included if the VS and/or staff participated at a public inquiry or an inquiry-type investigation into historical child abuse. Focus groups, open-ended questionnaire responses, and qualitative interviews were the premise of the articles' qualitative data collection and analysis (either virtual, telephone, written responses to interview questions, or in-person). Studies were excluded if VS were classed as children (under 18) at the time of participation. Additionally, articles were excluded if they did not include qualitative methods regarding experiences of participation. Studies were also excluded if they did not explore public inquiry participatory experiences of VS of child abuse. Lastly, if the experiential accounts of participation were second-hand, such as via relatives or friends of VS, these were also excluded as the primary exploration of this research is to

understand direct experiences of VS and associated staff.

2.2.3. Search Strategy

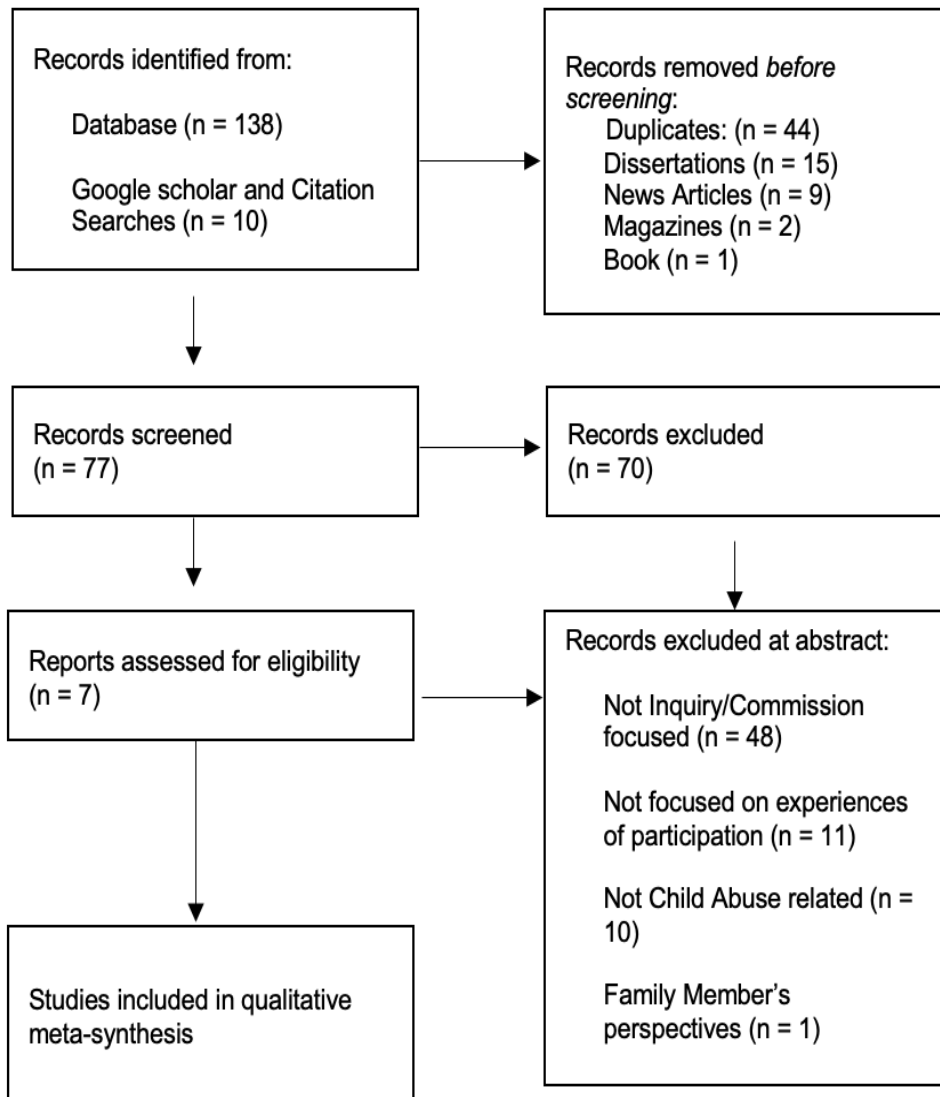
An electronic search via EBSCOhost was performed in February 2024 across these databases: APA, PsychINFO, Medline, NAHL and PubMed, and PsychARTICLES. 'Adult (18 years and over)' filters were applied, using the following search terms:

1. Victim OR Survivor OR Victims OR survivors
2. Participation OR Engagement OR Involvement OR Consultation
3. Public Inquiries OR Royal Commissions OR Independent Inquiry or Redress
4. Staff or personnel or employee
5. #1 AND #2 AND #3 AND #4

However, it yielded only four results, with two studies that met the criteria (Barker et al., 2023b; Moran & Salter, 2022). Following this, it was decided to remove 'staff or personnel or employee' from the search terms to explore whether this would expand the criteria, which it did to 138. A thorough review of titles and abstracts determined that a further two papers could be included (Barker et al., 2023a; Colton et al., 2002). Subsequently, citation searching was adopted to conduct a rigorous search. This involved conducting further reference searches and Google Scholar searches of public inquiries and VS participation. It also required studying the initial collected studies and their references to determine if there were any additional suitable articles to include. When examining suitability, attention was given to the inclusion criteria, the abstracts, and if the research study focussed on the participatory experience of VS and/or staff at a public inquiry. This yielded a further three articles suitable for inclusion (Hamber & Lundy, 2019; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Consequently, seven articles comprised the meta-ethnography synthesis (see figure 1) (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2019; Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019).

Figure 1

Flowchart of Database Search Strategy



2.2.4. Critical Appraisal

A quality assessment was undertaken of each study to determine suitability. This was conducted by following the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme tool (CASP), appraising the rigour of the qualitative research (CASP UK, 2024). CASP was beneficial in examining appropriateness of papers for inclusion by systematically processing the articles to be evaluated (Long et al., 2020). The tool accomplishes this by offering prompting questions of the specific methodology, to assist the researcher in establishing strengths and limitations of an article, whilst holding in mind the research question being studied. The review, informed by CASP, identified methodological questions to consider. Firstly, two studies (Barker et al., 2023a; Lundy, 2020) employed a mixed-method design, which included a section of Likert survey responses and percentages included in the articles.

It was determined that the studies were suitable to include, as both predominantly focused on qualitative data and adopted thematic analysis as their method of inquiry. Additionally, two articles (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020) utilised qualitative data from the same VS interviews and focus groups. When reviewing the two papers, the responses focused on two differing aspects of participation at a public inquiry: participatory experiences (Hamber & Lundy, 2020) and experiences in relation to justice aims (Lundy, 2020). Moreover, one paper included exploration of consultatory participation among VS (Hamber & Lundy, 2020): an additional and pertinent distinction. Stages of analysis were described in detail across all studies, however whether analysis of findings involved VS/staff validation and/or researcher triangulation was somewhat unclear across four studies (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019). Following careful consideration, it was determined that the review should include these studies in this synthesis as they offered valuable data for this meta-ethnography.

2.3 Results

The meta-ethnographic synthesis included studies that originated from Australia, England and Wales, Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland. The investigations and public inquiries included the Australian Royal Commission, IICSA, The Historical Abuse Inquiry in Northern Ireland (HIAI), The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA), and large-scale police investigations into historical sexual abuse across residential homes in the United Kingdom. Sample sizes of VS and staff ranged from 2 to 43 (interviews) 66 (survey) and 75 (focus group), totalling 293 participants. All study participants were adults, in line with the inclusion criteria. The method of qualitative inquiry for two studies included a mixed-method survey, all studies used individual semi-structured interviews, and one study included focus groups with VS.

2.3.1. *Determining how the studies are related*

Key factors emerged from the synthesised data. The factors range across six second-order themes, including: Giving Voice and Acquiring Recognition; A Culture of Integrity; Justice Aims and Reparation, Settings and Safety; Meaningful Agency and Adaptability; and Systems of Support. Table 1 (see Appendix A) provides an example of how the qualitative data was organised, specifying the design and interpretations deriving from the data.

2.3.2. *Translating the studies into one another*

Table 2. (see Appendix B) was produced to compare the key concepts of each study. This provided a foundation for comparison and analysis. It offered a way to examine and interpret how the studies translated or refuted notions and meaning about participation. This consequently ensured that the second order concepts which emerged were suitably relevant for understanding the factors that influenced the experience of participating in a child abuse public inquiry or large-scale investigations for VS and staff.

2.3.3. *Synthesising the translations*

Following Noblit and Hare's seven-step data analysis, each concept was reviewed and compared, to determine similarities and differences across studies and between staff and VS. The studies uncovered central areas of reciprocal translation, notably how appraisals of participation were similar across public inquiries. It highlighted small aspects of divergence, between VS on justice motivations and between staff and VS on their appraisal of support. Six second-order concepts emerged identifying key factors contributing to the experience of participation for VS across inquiries. Certain themes identified conditions which influenced the appraisal of participation for VS, others depicted how the experiential process (mis)aligned with justice-related aims of accountability and acknowledgement. This led to a conceptual model of synthesis encompassing all factors and motivations using Bourdieu's (2000) theory of habitus.

2.3.3.1 *Giving Voice and Acquiring Recognition*

One of the most prominent tenets that emerged across all studies affecting the experience of VS was the importance of feeling that what they contributed was credible, believed, and accepted. This provided a validating experience of participation for a majority of VS who recounted their experiences in confidential sessions at IICSA, HIAI, and the Royal Commission (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022). Acceptance and credence were a crucial antidote to experiences of devaluation and denial that were a significant part of their abuse and disclosure experiences (Moran & Salter, 2022). VS across studies depicted the profound impact, sense of acknowledgment, and relief from their participatory experiences of private sessions. Thus, it provided a 'felt' sense of having their personal stories of abuse respected and valued that VS linked to more positive experiences of participation at a public inquiry (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022).

Validation for individuals was demonstrated by staff and the public inquiry in several ways. Across studies, there was a hope for VS that they would have the ability to share their personal story in their own terms; private hearing and truth-telling processes at the four inquiries were mechanisms by which VS felt this was achieved. It met expressed aims to have a voice, challenging a stained institutional culture of silencing and cover ups, and valued and recognised their voice. Therefore, when staff and the inquiry process paid attention to the emotional and logistical processes of storytelling for VS, an enhanced experience was reported (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019). VS specified that implicit and explicit signifiers in Inquiry staff responses and Inquiry structural processes symbolised recognition. Both staff and VS spoke of the importance of thoughtfulness in the formation and process of participation private testimonial sessions. For instance, having a commissioner bear witness to a VS (Moran & Salter, 2022) affirmed that their contributions were important to the inquiry.

The inquiry's position on, and training into, conveying empathy and recognition was fundamental to the contribution of VS experience. Positive experiences were associated with feeling believed, having their story implicitly trusted, non-judgmental and validating responses from inquiry commissioners and staff (Barker et al., 2023a; Pembroke, 2019) and explicit acknowledgment of wrongdoing and harm caused (Moran & Salter, 2022) reduced internalised shame (Colton et al., 2002; Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019). For many VS, this symbolised acknowledgment. It provided a powerful alternative narrative and circuit breaker for VS (Moran & Salter, 2022), contributing to increased self-acceptance, and reducing the strength of previously held views about their own credibility. Thus, VS identified that providing evidence could contribute towards therapeutic healing when the framework of confidential testimonial sessions was in line with more 'truth telling' processes, whereby information was accepted without question or narratives were untested (Colton et al., 2002; Barker et al.,

2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019)

Staff also indicated the importance of providing signifiers of validation for VS. Ways this could be achieved from staff perspectives included tailoring to individual needs, active listening to the subjective experience, and not making assumptions about impact (Barker et al., 2023b; Moran & Salter, 2022). Recognising the subjective impact and experience of trauma was identified as important to convey empathy. Others felt it was important to recognise and acknowledge VS' strengths, resources, and resilience (Barker et al., 2023b; Moran & Salter, 2022) throughout the testimonial and support process. These sentiments were mirrored by some VS, who felt empowered by such experiences (Barker et al., 2023a).

The way in which VS could give voice to their abuse experiences was also identified as a key factor in less positive appraisals of participation. Notably, the dynamics of public or statutory hearings, investigations, and redress panels, were a barrier to whether VS felt their voice was valued. Particularly when VS' personal experiences were critically questioned, limited to providing binary responses, or minimised, heightened experiences of shame, silencing, and injustice were present (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Some VS were retraumatised and significantly emotionally impacted by such encounters (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). This was experienced in the ways in which Inquiry staff conducted proceedings. Several VS described such interactions with barristers and their involvement in public hearings as a parallel process to their abuse, activating feelings of shame and devaluation (Lundy, 2020). Some VS described their family and personal context being questioned (Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019) compounding the abuse in a public arena. Such exposing and intimidating experiences gave rise to self-blame, feeling as if they had done something wrong for proceedings to be conducted in this way (Lundy, 2020). It also signified to VS that their experiences somehow held less validity depending on their interpersonal context. Thus, legalistic approaches to the testimonial process could be harmful for some VS. Public

scrutiny of experiences, and in some instances being blamed for them, re-enacted abusive practices, institutional betrayal, and compounded experiences of traumatic shame.

2.3.3.2. Justice Aims and The Process of Reparation

Understanding which justice interests are prioritised for VS in the context of public inquiries felt importantly linked to meanings they ascribe to their experience of participation (Daly, 2017; Lundy, 2020). As expressed by VS in HIAI and CICA, justice aims and interests both aligned and differed relating to meaning and expectations surrounding acknowledgment, accountability, and on reparations such as redress schemes and memorialisation (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Accountability was a justice aim that was paramount to participation for VS. Studies revealed there were clear expectations that public inquiries acknowledge the extent of harm incurred and address state and institutional failings. VS shared these as key motivating factors for enduring the potential traumatic impact of giving evidence to statutory processes (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Symbolic acknowledgement by recognition and public apologies were viewed as crucial, providing a sense of vindication for some (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). But for others, apologies were deemed meaningless and insincere without commitment to public acceptance of responsibility and remuneration through financial compensation, changes in legislation, and specialist care (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019).

Financial redress schemes are an essential part of delivering reparations and public acknowledgement (Lundy, 2020). However, accountability through material acknowledgement can conflict with the emotional needs of VS (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020, Pembroke, 2019). Most of the VS who applied to redress schemes (HIAI and CICA) reported the process to be lengthy, distressing and highly devaluing. For some attending hearings this was a key contributor to a decline in their mental health and overall functioning (Pembroke, 2019; Lundy, 2020). The scoring system to assess financial

compensation meant that VS were having to recount and document every painful experience and lasting effects they live with (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Moreover, aftercare was limited or not provided for those who attended the redress hearings at CICA (Pembroke, 2019), leaving VS feeling alone and retraumatised. Additionally, degrading public media narratives that VS are motivated by financial compensation perpetuated shame and minimised the harrowing impact of the abusive conditions they endured (Colton et al., 2002; Lundy, 2020). As such, some VS expressed regret in their participation, reporting that the financial compensation was not worth the psychosocial costs (Lundy, 2020). Furthermore, the experiences of conditionality around action waiver agreements and anonymity of those responsible (CICA) and financial limits (HIAI) of redress at public inquiries perpetuated moral outrage. It symbolised to VS a lack of proper acknowledgement, and signified a loss of hope that governmental attitude towards protecting VS would change (Pembroke, 2019).

For both HIAI and CICA, the sociohistorical context were notable barriers to remedial and justice-related aims being achieved, and as articulated by VS, were associated with disempowerment and disappointment. Particularly, the relationship between church and state left questions for VS regarding decisions about the exclusionary remit, reparations, and investigations (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). This included, for instance, HIAI opting to not investigate most church-run residential institutions (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020), or determining that no naming or prosecutions of perpetrators within the religious orders would be conducted, and a felt sense of being re-silenced by action waiver agreements at CICA (Pembroke, 2019), resulting in anger, fear, and confusion. This significantly limited the sense of public accountability and justice being achieved for VS. Clearly, justice-related aims were central both to VS' motivation to participate and to their overall appraisal of their experience.

2.3.3.3. A Culture of Integrity

Integrity is a multifaceted concept; one that has both inter- and intrapersonal meanings for VS of child abuse. Integrity can be defined by moral principles of upholding honesty, truth-telling, reliability, and fairness (McFall, 1987). It can also be understood in the personal, value-laden context of providing a template of standards and ethics to live by - how to be true to oneself (McFall, 1987). Thus, integrity is of high importance for VS, due to its ethical, justice-oriented qualities, and fostering trustworthiness. Integrity was identified by VS across all investigations and Inquiries as either interlinked with an empowering and positive experience, or connected to feelings of betrayal, despair, and for some, contributing to re-traumatisation.

Studies across inquiries depicted components of integrity as important determinants to positive experiences of participation and consultation at a public inquiry for VS. Reliability, consistency in communication and action, and honesty in interactions with staff and inquiry processes increased ease, safety, and trustworthiness of the participatory process for many VS across inquiries (Barker et al., 2023a; Colton et al., 2002; Moran & Salter, 2022). Inquiry staff also identified coherence and clarity as a core part of integrity for VS, particularly with regards to managing expectations and decision-making processes. This was characterised by a need to create a culture of transparency and empowerment (Barker et al., 2023b). Staff also described the importance of ensuring words and actions align as foundational to building trust, safety, and integrity with VS (Barker et al., 2023b; Moran & Salter, 2022). Thus, clear and 'matched up' communication for both staff and VS, was seen as providing a better experience to both, especially in providing clear expectations of what the inquiry could and could not do. Practically, this extended to sending links to protocols about redactions in statements, so VS were aware of why decisions were made, providing details about information storage, so individuals could make informed choices about their contribution, and clearly stating the support provision process.

An absence of reliability and coherence of words and actions from inquiry and legal staff influenced negative experiences for VS (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Pembroke,

2019). Discrepancies in coherence created disappointment and mistrust for some VS in how they initially presented values and aims of the inquiry to be VS-centric, and the reality of this, post-participation. (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). For others, points of engagement to participation were intrusive and exposing. Stability and predictability are important for survivors to feel safe, however, VS recalled shock of being unexpectedly approached at home or by post without warning about investigations (Colton et al., 2002). Additionally, VS at HIAI, many without full information about their earlier life, recalled experiences of being presented information pertaining to their family or early life experiences minutes prior to testimony. Limited time to digest and process such information, resulted in VS feeling blindsided, overwhelmed, exposed, and powerless (Hamber & Lundy 2020; Lundy, 2020).

Instances of limited preparation by legal staff regarding public testimonial processes was linked to a lack of informed consent, re-traumatisation and secondary victimisation. Studies of VS participation at HIAI and CICA (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019) described instances of this. Several VS likened public participation to significantly damaging their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing, owing to critical cross-examination whilst testifying. Additionally, seeing fellow VS treated this way resulted in helplessness and anger among other VS (Lundy, 2020). This was contrary to the public inquiry's assurance that VS would not experience an adversarial or critical cross-examination process. A lack of dignity and sincerity in the redress process from some legal firms representing large numbers of VS resulted in feelings of dehumanisation for VS and a lack of personalised consideration (Pembroke, 2019). Others echoed the lack of sincerity and transparency by firms, reporting discouragement around redress inclusion, and decisions about financial awards taken between the board and legal firm without their input or knowledge (Pembroke, 2019). Consequently, the experiences signified a lack of integrity and trustworthiness in the transitional justice aims of the inquiry for several VS.

2.3.3.4. Settings and Safety

Notably across all five inquiries, the physical environment and setting was identified as being essential to building a sense of safety and was a contributing factor to VS' overall experience. The environment and the creation of space was paramount to initial impressions signifying whether it could be safe for VS to speak openly about their experiences and the implications of abuse. There were noticeable differences between the environmental experiences of a statutory public hearing, a redress panel, and a private listening session for VS.

There was a marked positive difference in experience for VS relating to private testimonial sessions (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022). VS described how physical spaces were informed and curated to create a sense of dignity, ease, and comfort, in what can be emotionally laden experiences, recounting painful and traumatic memories. A sense of homeliness and 'nurturing' environment for VS was vital in reducing the sense of threat, and were welcomed considering their abusive experiences (Barker et al., 2023a; Moran & Salter, 2022) Moving away from cold, clinical spaces that may resemble institutions that could activate unwanted memories, seemed a priority for staff also who saw the setting as crucial for fostering physical safety, increasing a sense of trust, and enhancing the participatory experience (Moran & Salter, 2022). Like VS, a sense of homeliness, nurture, and choice were identified as key factors enhancing the overall experience for VS by staff (Barker et al., 2023b; Moran & Salter, 2022). For IICSA, the private testimonial process and setting was co-designed with a Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP), who anticipated and adapted the process (Barker et al., 2023a). This had a meaningful impact, as VS described a humanising environment and tailored process of participation increased their sense of worthiness (Barker et al., 2023a). Thus, across Inquiries, the use of private hearing settings was praised by VS, providing a safer foundation to share experiences.

Statutory public hearing settings were in stark contrast to the private testimonial hearings. The socio-political landscape or symbolism of the setting also impacted appraisal

of the participatory process for VS. Settings located in an area which for most, had opposing religious affiliations, compounded feelings of unsafety for VS. The overwhelming nature of providing testimony was also heightened in more formal settings akin to a courthouse, signifying to some feelings that they were 'on trial' (Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). This gave the impression that legal and bureaucratic requirements of a space appeared to take precedent over the need for physical safety for VS. A comfortable and safe environment before and after testimonial processes was essential to the overall experience; however, in one inquiry, VS were seated near to their abusers whilst waiting to give evidence. The experience of threat and humiliation, indicated to VS that their protection was not a priority (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). This was a move away from the victim-centric aims of settings that minimised discomfort, which all Inquiries claimed to strive for. Thus, these studies highlighted how environmental experiences at inquiries brought up significant feelings of exposure, vulnerability, and shame for VS during participation (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019).

2.3.3.5. Meaningful Agency and Adaptability

Agency for VS was an essential aspect of the participatory process. The meaning of agency in a public inquiry and across participatory formats (private, public, redress, consultation) was a reciprocal theme across studies. Powerlessness is a central aspect of the traumatic experiences of child abuse. Thus, fostering a personal sense of agency is a crucial part of the healing process for many VS (Herman, 2023). Both VS and staff reflected upon the perceptions of meaningful agency. Meaningful in this sense: whether VS felt their views were consulted, and whether they had choice and flexibility throughout the decision-making process during participation.

VS groups have successfully lobbied their respective governments for public inquiries (Wright, & Henry, 2019). Thus, having a voice as a key stakeholder in the justice process was vital for many. Two Inquiries, IICSA and HIAI, referred to VS consultation as an

additional participatory stream. VS at HIAI were involved in initial consultative processes during its development, described hopefulness at first about their involvement. Over time, they felt let down by the process, and that the consultative process was not collaborative (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). This left some VS who participated at this stage feeling very responsible for the experience of VS, concerned with overlooking aspects, and feeling ill-equipped to shape inquiry processes (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). Others conveyed disempowerment, concluding their involvement was to satisfy inquiry requirements rather than due to a culture of collaboration (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). Instead of initial hopefulness of a victim-centric coproduced model of public inquiry, the impression left was that a consultation model of VS participation was a facade, not embodied in the structure of inquiry processes (Hamber & Lundy, 2020).

Agency during private and public testimonial processes was identified as essential to a positive experience. Among VS with favourable memories of participation, an increased sense of choice and control across processes was paramount to this. Having a detailed understanding of what the testimonial process would entail, allowed VS to be equipped with all information to decide to participate. Processes and decisions when made jointly or by VS, such as format and timing of their private testimonial hearing, were linked to greater sense of comfort and confidence, both as an empowering experience, and in the inquiry process (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022). Drawing on VS resourcefulness was also identified as enhancing the participatory experience by VS across studies (Barker et al., 2023a; Moran & Salter, 2022), and a key positive difference for some, to perceived narratives of 'incapability' and fragility (Barker et al., 2023a).

Similarly, flexibility in approach was a crucial element that staff identified as facilitating ease, increased psychological safety, and earning trustworthiness. Both VS and staff across studies at IICSA and The Australian Royal Commission described flexibility as crucial to eliminate barriers to participate. VS identified that having requests smoothly accommodated, indicated to them that their contribution was important to the inquiry (Moran

& Salter, 2022). Staff reiterated VS' reflections in creating conditions which fostered increased choice and control as vital to minimising discomfort and the potential for any harmful re-enactment (Barker et al., 2023b).

Having more agency was an expectation and hope for many VS. However, in studies involving public hearings, investigations, and redress participation, VS recalled shock, anger, despondency, and devaluation associated with their experience. Poorer appraisals were associated with limited to no preparation or explanation being provided about the structure and process of investigations and hearings (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Moreover, investigations and public hearings reignited feelings of disempowerment due to legalistic structures. Hamber and Lundy (2020) underlined the disappointment that fact-finding processes of giving evidence were prioritised over the truth-telling justice needs for VS. For many who participated in these formats, tension between the 'fact-finding' rigid structure and the need for an adaptable process for VS bearing witness, resulted in a loss of faith in the legal representatives, feeling disbelieved, and heightened anxiety.

2.3.3.6. *Systems of Support*

Therapeutic and social support enhance the facilitation of a public discourse and awareness around the extent and overwhelming impact of institutional child abuse (Sköld, 2015). Systems of support around the impact of participation was a theme across inquiries. For VS participating in the public Inquiries captured in this synthesis, experiences were emotionally salient, due to the nature of their personal experiences. Whilst public inquiries aimed to minimise the impact, reliving abusive experiences during testimonial experiences could be highly distressing for VS. Systems of support, particularly people's personal support system, the inquiry's support provision, and the organisational culture of care, were a recurring theme: one that could foster safety and minimise lasting salient effects or compound the emotional impact.

Owing to the pervasiveness of denial and silencing associated with institutional childhood abuse, for several VS, this was the first time sharing their experience. Disclosing for the first time at a public inquiry meant that some VS participated in secret, without support systems in place throughout the process. Isolation was a compounding factor to coping with the aftermath of participation. Lasting effects of feeling exposed that many navigated alone were shared by VS, an experience characterised by panic, regret, overwhelm, and re-traumatisation (Colton et al 2002; Lundy, 2020; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Coping with the aftermath of reliving devastating traumatic memories led to significant and lasting psychological distress for some (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). The impact resulted in loss of jobs (Colton et al., 2002), and in relationship breakdown when some VS disclosed to family and spouses (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Colton et al., 2002; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). This isolation and further losses were felt acutely and had long-term implications for healing. This was exacerbated for some by limited provision of psychological support available throughout and following their participation.

Support offered was a recurring theme which created mixed feelings for VS. Several VS depicted feeling well supported throughout the process (Barker et al., 2023a; Colton et al., 2002; Moran & Salter, 2022). This was characterised as providing a useful scaffolding to the overall experience. Attunement to VS needs prior, during, and following participation, was identified as indicative of care. Acts of thoughtfulness, consistency, and individualised care by staff members created 'breathtaking' experiences for some VS and attention to detail indicated a moral commitment to dignified care (Moran & Salter, 2022). Faith was increased that the standard of care would be consistent irrespective of staff, reflecting wider a welcomed organisational integrity for VS.

For many staff, it was especially pertinent to create an emotionally safe environment to minimise harm and re-traumatisation. There was acknowledgement by staff that inquiry practices could be comparable to institutional experiences, and recognition of potential

implications of contributing for VS (Moran & Salter, 2022). Thus, there was a keen focus on avoiding recreating conditions that were parallel processes to abuse. Efforts to achieve this by inquiries focused on developing a trauma-informed organisational culture, specialist co-produced training, (Barker et al. 2023b) and promoting a sense of value, dignity, and worth for both VS and staff (Moran & Salter, 2022).

Staff emphasised the importance of emotional scaffolding during involvement, and some positively appraised their support package (Barker et al., 2023b) However, for other VS, the format and structure resulted in a sudden decline or cease in support following participation (Colton et al., 2002). Thus, support was deemed limited, and not enough to adequately hold them during the process. Considering this, some VS across all studies described feelings of abandonment, disappointment, overwhelm, and disempowerment. Consequently, VS groups were left in some cases to support substantive disparity between the emotional impact and support provision (Colton et al., 2002; Hamber & Lundy, 2020). For several VS who expressed dissatisfaction at support provision across studies, there were lasting emotional effects that they continued to work through in months and years following participation (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019).

2.4 Line of Argument Synthesis

The emerging components associated with appraisal of participation across the investigatory, private, public, and redress panel contexts are multifaceted and interlinked. A concept which underpins both the 'felt' experiential conditions and the justice-related motivation appraisals, would be that of Bourdieu (1990), and later, Wacquant's (2011) explanation of habitus. It refers to a matrix of embodied dispositions, characterised by past experiences that both consciously and unconsciously navigate the perceptions and actions of individuals (Bourdieu, 2000). In this way, habitus is an intersubjective experience, shaped by habits and expectations of agents, structures, and the social world. It is mediated by

capital and can reproduce the structures that limit agency (Bourdieu, 2017). It attends to the dualism of both the social structures and positioning, or *fields*, in which power operates, and how this is influenced by the implicit and explicit social rules, which Bourdieu refers to as *nomos*. However, habitus can also be adaptive, and an active mechanism for change. It can empower and shift iterative social transformation during conflict and processes of repair (Nair, 2024).

Bourdieu (2000) purported that the disruption of *nomos* was required to achieve iterative social transformation, and this argument can be usefully applied for VS in a public inquiry. *Nomos*, in the context of this study, refers to the legal and civil service rules, practices, processes, and culture operating at an Inquiry. Such legalistic and bureaucratic constructions and rules may serve to prioritise efficiency and impartiality of investigation. However, as depicted across VS' poorer appraisals of their experiences, such dominating *nomos* prioritising clinical objectivity and fact-finding investigations in public hearings can maintain the status quo and limit agency. This can result in experiencing a lack of public acknowledgment, particularly in relation to VS's autonomy over truth-telling processes. Such experiences created disappointment, disempowerment and for several VS, re-traumatisation.

To shift the dominant rules which govern an inquiry field, it cannot be the sole responsibility of those enduring hegemonic cultures (Bourdieu, 2017). Those from inside with social and cultural capital (commissioners, secretariats, chairs, and panels) must adapt the field and create processes which disrupt ways of working in an inquiry to neutralise power structures that keep VS from participating in processes of justice. When inquiries and their staff considered the emotional and ethical habitus of VS of institutional child abuse, VS reported more positive summations of participating in justice processes. These factors reflect trauma-informed principles, and recognition of the emotional habitus of VS, such as a need for acknowledgment, collaboration, and empowerment, consideration of emotional and physical safety, and minimising harm. This indicates that when the field, as determined by

the legal and civil service bureaucracy, is shaped with VS, it has the potential to reduce tensions. It also could relocate internalised experiences of shame, and become a cathartic process, something which is key to transitional justice processes such as commissions of inquiry.

2.5. Discussion

This meta-ethnography explored factors influencing how VS appraised their experience of participation, and the staff working within public inquiries. The factors identified were largely intertwined, and based upon motivations and hopes of participation, and the conditions by which the inquiry fostered a trauma-informed environment for them to participate. In short, what shaped their appraisal was whether both justice and trauma-related aims, and their expectations prior to participating, aligned with the reality of their experience. Positive appraisal of participation among VS and staff were linked with private testimonial processes, recognition and being believed, physical and emotional safety, earning trustworthiness through a culture of dignity and integrity, and an empowering participatory process (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al 2023b; Colton et al., 2002; Moran & Salter, 2022). Poorer appraisal was associated with public testimonial and redress panel participation, wider socio-political context, lack of informed consent, limited control in testimonial processes, and the amount of support available. This resulted, for some VS, in experiences of silencing, institutional betrayal, and re-traumatisation (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019).

Factors associated with VS' emotional and moral habitus connected to hopes and justice-related expectations. Initially, participation was motivated by justice aims, particularly raising awareness of the abuses and the moral failings by institutions. However, experiences of participation often did not match hopes of public acknowledgment and accountability. Poorer appraisals were described as connected to suspicion, questioning credibility,

disappointment, and devaluation. This was notable in tensions between initial consultatory and public testimonial processes and legal inquiry structures. Thus, despite public inquiries' reported aims to centre focus on VS testimony, this was experienced differently by VS. Several reported concluding that their participatory needs were not of equal value to the rigid mechanism of justice, and consequently felt this as disempowering, humiliating, and at worst re-traumatising. Considering this, disrupting the social positioning and structures of staff and VS in a public inquiry field seems crucial (Bourdieu, 2000).

The process of reparation and justice aims contribute to a complex picture for VS. Over the course of time in settled democracies, the social and historical constructions of victim and survivorhood surrounding non-recent child abuse have politicised victimology. In aiming to construct narratives around victim/survivorhood, it can inadvertently perpetuate binary understandings of who is seen and recognised as a VS according to society (McEvoy & McConnachie, 2012). It can therefore create a politics around victim/survivorhood and an unwanted hierarchy regarding how VS wants and needs are understood, prioritised, or legitimised. The studies revealed both collective and differing justice motivations for VS participating in public inquiries. Such instances of VS feeling 'torn apart' in public testimonial settings with cross-examinations based upon their earlier life experiences, family circumstances, or later life events (Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019), underline how public inquiry testimonial processes can create unhelpful hierarchies of victim/survivorhood. In these instances, for such VS, it resulted in a painful detraction from the experiences of abuse inflicted upon them, and instead posed questions of their legitimacy around victim/survivorhood. Such experiences therefore could result in VS being positioned against one another or deterred from sharing their experiences of abuse. Consequently, it may mean that not all VS' views on justice aims and reparations are captured or considered in justice mechanisms such as public inquiries.

Validation and recognition, particularly in closed testimonial sessions were significant, especially if VS felt believed during their participatory process. It indicated that

when greater attention to detail was given to VS' emotional habitus, the more VS were put at ease and experienced a greater sense of safety. Emotional expression and responsiveness were both considered as pertinent for VS when appraising their experiences; both in a meaningful sense of agency, in having a sense of control and empowerment over the experiential process, and in the ability to seek support available from either their personal network or inquiry organisation. Thus, across the four public inquiries, trauma-informed principles were identified as critical to the experience of VS. In the inquiries both VS and staff depicted the importance of the dynamic foundation being that of compassion and dignity. This adds to existing research reflecting the importance of fostering an organisational culture, including the transitory space in which inquiries operate (Salter, 2020), which recognises the crucial value of dignified practices, and the role this can play in minimising shame and enhancing experiences for VS of child abuse (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022).

An organisational culture which fosters safety, empowerment, and integrity were an expectation for VS, particularly clarity and transparency about the processes of participation. Betrayal, denial, deceit, and oppression are core to experiences of child abuse (Herman, 1992; Hunter, 2010). Thus, this synthesis highlights the prioritisation of integrity needed for VS, the importance of inquiries adopting ethical processes and being justice-oriented, and in their ambition for truth-telling, coherence, and fairness. Moreover, interpersonally, for VS, personal integrity can be an essential facilitator of social connection, determining whether others' beliefs and actions align, and therefore essential to the foundations of another person or organisation's trustworthiness (McFall, 1987). Several appraisals of consistency, feeling valued, feeling emotionally and physically safe, having control and choice were highlighted as the positive aspects of participating in private testimonial processes, matching emotional habitus of VS between expectations and practice. As Herman (2023) depicts, alignment and consistency between communication and action are crucial to healing processes for VS. This indicates that inquiries must foster circumstances which provide

scope for individuals to make informed consent about their involvement. Without this, trustworthiness of both staff, and the inquiry's intentions as a mechanism to deliver justice for VS, will be reduced. It also indicates the pertinence of recognising the emotional needs of VS, and the effectiveness of taking steps towards creating processes and cultures which anticipate and incorporate emotionality into the environment (Pratt, 2021), particularly when impartiality and neutrality can dominate. Moreover, it underlines the value of trauma-informed approaches and principles being adopted into the structure of the inquiry.

However, there seem to be limits and tensions in the ways in which trauma-informed approaches are applied. One of the factors of habitus, where neutralising power is concerned for VS, are the conditions and practices of those with cultural, economic, and social capital, and the structures that exist within the inquiry field (Wacquant, 2011). This perhaps can be where a tension lies, that whilst there are inquiry staff that advocate for TIA across the inquiry and particularly in private and public testimonial processes, for some, structural barriers exist which can illuminate and reproduce agency and capital imbalances remaining between staff and VS. It also could limit opportunities for creating collaborative and mutual spaces that empower those participating to feel of equal value. This suggests a quandary in how staff and public bodies limit the transactional nature of these dynamics, which are implicitly built into both intersubjective relations, and into the structure of inquiries. It adds to the existing research depicting a limit to mutuality for VS who have reflected on their experiences of participation in public inquiries as transitional justice processes (Gallen, 2023; McAlinden & Naylor, 2016). Considering this potential barrier, it can put into question the extent to which emotional and moral habitus of VS can be given equal consideration to that of the legal and structural practices of commissions of inquiry.

It appears that VS' experiences of participating through testimony and redress panels, are shaped by whether a public inquiry and redress scheme is equipped or able to adapt their praxis and structures. Adaptability was important to empower, create safety and trust, minimise reactivating trauma, and it was a crucial component of a trauma-informed

experience for VS. The results of this meta-ethnography highlight the existing dilemma for statutory public inquiries as a justice mechanism. Public inquiries claim to be centred on VS testimony and offer this as both an opportunity to bear witness and contribute towards healing processes (Wright, 2017). Private testimonial sessions were predominantly favourable across inquiries and supports this notion in part. However, this synthesis also aligns with research depicting bureaucratic and legalistic structures of public testimonial processes as conflicting with the trauma-informed principles that enhance participatory experiences for VS (Lundy, 2020; McAlinden, 2013). Thus, statutory processes mean that whilst institutions, documents, and key individuals can be compelled, the structural process is judicially bound by rules and regulation. This adds to identified dilemmas of how justice can be actualised in public inquiry settings for VS (Lundy, 2020; McAlinden & Naylor, 2016). It also underscores Gallen's (2023) assertion that a new hybrid justice paradigm is necessary, and "a failure to expand the imagination and practices of what is necessary to respond to historical abuses may result in the very mechanisms of transitional justice being used to consolidate the power of states and churches and cause fresh and additional harm to victim-survivors" (p7).

2.6. Strengths and Limitations

This meta-ethnography explored experiences of VS and staff from four separate public inquiries into institutional historical child abuse. A large sample of insights were drawn upon, which strengthened the validity of the synthesis, with 269 individual contributions included in the studies (235 VS, and 34 Inquiry staff). Valuable insights were gained from a cross-section of participatory processes which VS encountered, including initial consultation, private testimony sessions, public testimonial hearings, and redress panels. It identified key differences in experiences between the public participatory processes across public inquiries and large-scale investigations. It illuminated understanding of the conditions which contributed towards an empowered, emotionally safer, and positive process of participation. It also highlighted barriers, including limiting settings and structures in the process,

contributing to feelings of devaluation, disappointment, injustice, and re-traumatisation. However, there is limited research understanding the experience of each participatory process for VS in public inquiries. This subsequently led to a smaller synthesis pool of studies, and a wider variation of participatory contexts. VS are not monolithic, and institutional child abuse occurs across a wide variety of contexts and settings; therefore, greater research is required in this area for these synthesised findings to be generalisable to VS of historical child abuse inquiries.

Public inquiries aim to understand a cross-section of VS experiences, needs, and interests. However, less is understood about the experiences of more advocacy-based and agentic VS who provide consultation to public inquiries. VS who contributed in this way at HIAI (Hamber & Lundy; 2020) offered mixed, but predominantly disempowering experiences of initial consultation with inquiry staff. Additionally, Barker et al. (2023a) referred to the value and influence of a lived-experience consultation group within IICSA. Research exploring VS' consultative experiences would provide richer understanding to how public inquiries collaborate with VS in the development and adaption of inquiry streams of investigation and testimonial processes. As research highlights, across public health and third sector bodies, a comparable tension to this synthesis is present, associated with epistemological power and agency in the roles for experts by lived experience or VS advocates (Wilson & Goodman, 2021). Therefore, further research into lived experience consultation by VS could provide a new platform of understanding how lived-experience consultation may usefully operate in public inquiries.

An identified barrier in the experience of participation for VS was reported in interactions with legal processes and staff (Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Future research could explore the perspective of legal and civil service staff in public inquiries to gain insight into the tensions between legal structures and VS needs. Focus groups with both VS and staff and together to document tensions, alignments, and potential solutions could help facilitate organisational culture which incorporates both trauma-informed approaches and

offers clarity about the legal limits under which inquiries operate. This would allow for better understanding of the function of public inquiries, and more VS to make informed choices about forms of participation.

This synthesis offered valuable insights into the experiences of VS participating in public inquiries. It gave a clear overview of the importance of organisational culture and practices for VS, and what this means. Studies indicated that private hearing processes have been viewed favourably by VS, and seen as largely contributing to a therapeutic justice. However, the dilemma and tension remains for public hearings and redress panel processes in how a sense of justice can be achieved when the experience of participation results in disempowerment and disillusion for many VS. It indicates that the organisational culture is paramount in meeting VS needs, and greater flexibility and integrity in justice processes is required to enhance experiences of VS participation in public inquiries.

2.7. The Current Research Background: The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and The Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), established in 2015, was a statutory inquiry in England and Wales, operating under the Inquiries Act 2005. Its terms of reference and remit allowed for a broad examination into how and where individuals and institutions had failed to protect children from harm. It aimed to achieve this through three key areas: investigations and public hearings, through research and analysis aiming to increase knowledge on the area of CSA, and lastly, the involvement of VS via the Truth Project, with over 6000 VS sharing their personal experiences with the Inquiry and could make recommendations for change. This was central to increasing an understanding of the extent and impact of CSA. At its conclusion, IICSA published its final report with 20 recommendations for redress, policy, and care reform. Its legacy work involved working with

VS in memorialising benches and plaques to honour VS and continue efforts to raise awareness of CSA (IICSA, 2022).

As part of IICSA's commitment to centre VS experiences (IICSA, 2023), there were three areas of VS participation. The Truth Project, VS forums, to update and obtain feedback from VS about their ongoing investigations, and a publicly appointed panel. Prior to changing the model of public inquiry to statutory, the Home Office consulted with external survivor advocates and stakeholders to listen the expressed public concerns about its current model. It also sought to understand key considerations of adopting and navigating an Inquiry approach which would be trauma-informed for both VS and staff. Ultimately, these meetings led to the development of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP). The VSCP operated in an advisory and consultative capacity to IICSA's chair and panel. Members had backgrounds in providing specialist support to VS of CSA in a variety of settings, and several were actively involved in survivor advocacy, campaigning and lobbying the government (after the inquiry was announced) to ensure that IICSA was a statutory inquiry (IICSA, 2022). It was a panel with extensive professional and personal insights, and its role included sharing knowledge and experience across a variety of platforms. This included providing a bridge of communication for VS and The Inquiry. It also involved working with the mass media to both defend the Inquiry and enhance understanding of the Truth Project. Panel members worked in collaboration with clinicians to establish, advise, and adapt the experiential process of contributing to the Truth Project, to cultivate a trauma-informed approach for VS participating. They also worked alongside research and development teams to consult on research and policy documents, and with clinical staff to co-deliver training on intersecting aspects of survivorship, safeguarding, and trauma-informed approaches (IICSA, 2022). Thus, the VSCP's work was varied and vital in contributing to an enhanced understanding of VS experiences and needs.

2.8. Aims and Research Rationale

In public inquiries, considering and centring lived experiences of VS of non-recent CSA is paramount. In terms of agency, epistemological parity, and emotional impact, VS' participation in such mechanisms to deliver justice is highly nuanced. There are key differences identified in research exploring the impact of public and private testimonial and redress participation both in experiential and justice-related terms: bearing in mind crucial proponents connected to appraisal are attempts to assimilate the emotional and ethical habitus of VS. Participation for VS, in this context, has been favourably associated with symbolic acknowledgement, recognition, and contributing towards healing.

There is little understanding, however, of the experiences of VS consultation in public inquiries investigating historical institutional CSA. Therefore, this research employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology with both scholar-researchers alongside participant-researchers of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP), to document and examine their experiences of participation. It aimed to understand the process of consultation for VS, how this was facilitated or hindered by inquiry structures and processes. As part of the action research process, its objective was to collectively uncover key learnings and implications from their experiences and translate these into recommendations for future VS panels operating in this capacity (Wright et al., 2023). Lastly, the project aimed to collectively translate and analyse the experiences into a scholarly journal article, to contribute new understandings of VS participation in public inquiries (Taggart et al., in prep).

3. Methodology

3.1. A Participative Reality

Ontology is concerned with how we determine or classify reality or existence (Creswell, 2013). To consider the ontological framework for this project, it was important to begin by acknowledging that there is no one way to interpret the social world. Experiences of institutional child sexual abuse and survivorship differ substantially. When examining the intertwining nature of the reality of The Inquiry, consulting a cross-section of survivor interest groups to understand the vast array of experiences, was in IICSA's Terms of Reference (IICSA, 2022). Recognising this was also pertinent to consider the social, psychological, and historical context underpinning the reality of a survivor group working at The Inquiry. Differences in perception, interests and ontological perspectives were inevitable between individuals. Consequently, the framework of this project looked towards idealism, transcending into embracing pluralism and adopting a participative reality (Lincoln, et al., 2011). This allowed examination of intersubjective and collective realities of a consultant-survivor panel, and the social constructions of it within The Inquiry (Ritchie, 2015). Considering this, the participatory action research model was determined as one which is centred around understanding and reflecting upon varied realities. Moreover, scholar researchers involved in this research project have their own varied ontological positions. Two members (DT and SF) of the PAR research team had worked at The Inquiry prior to the project's formation, and two (KW and HG) were engaged as scholar researchers external to the context of IICSA.

3.2. Participatory Action Research - A Critical Experiential Epistemology

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is considered an emancipatory methodology, one which involves a collaborative approach at each stage of the investigative process with participant-researchers (McIntyre, 2008), who are essential stakeholders and community members. This approach aims to explore structural differences, inequities, and as part of the research, identify ways to address the challenges faced (Bradbury, 2015). It can be transformational both for the academic researchers and partner communities. PAR has historically evolved as an action research design and process (Cahill, 2007), moving from positivist paradigmatic action research and towards open designs that evoke a critical consciousness (Friere, 1996; Fals-Borda, 1987), components which involve critical reflection, motivation, and action. Research design aims include liberation and informative transformation through the process of working alongside others to challenge existing social practices with critical reflection as key to the research process; “It is therefore collaborative, change-oriented and overtly political” (MacNaughton, 2001, p210). This project aligns with more recent PAR designs, associated with learnings and actionable social transformation for survivor stakeholders. It speaks to epistemic justice (Fricker, 2017), seeking to understand and exploring the ways in which knowledge was generated and valued across different cultures and practices within a public inquiry.

Jackson (2009) postulated that the relationship between experience and episteme is often unclear, until profound events occur in life, and one anchors their experience and identification with a framework of knowledge, thinking and ideals. Arendt (1994) argued that when considering how knowledge and thought are constructed beyond the thinker, an intersubjective position of judgement occurs, whereby active engagement and conversation takes place between the thoughts and knowledge of two entities. Intersubjectivity and value judgement “rel[ies] on a method of suspending our accustomed ways of thinking, not by an effort of intellectual will, but *by a method of displacing ourselves from our customary habitus*”

(Jackson, 2009, p.242, emphasis original). This research aligns with Jackson's notion of moving beyond the epistemological assumption that thought and generating knowledge should illuminate the essence of a culture or person, in this case the consulting survivors, and away from evaluating the 'truth' of a belief or action against intellectual or ethical ideals in social context of The Inquiry. In this way, this PAR project aimed to highlight the VSCP's mode of being in the world (Jackson, 2012), and as a group of survivors operating in a public inquiry.

This research partnered with a group of VS publicly appointed to offer their insights in an advisory capacity to IICSA: the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP). Public bodies like NHS England have begun the culture shift to Patient and Public Involvement (PPI), with various roles utilising experiential expertise, including lived experience panels (Batalden & Foster, 2021). The VSCP was the first of its kind in a Child Abuse Inquiry, and therefore understanding its unique position seemed pertinent. The research aimed to gain insight into how the VSCP experienced their appointment individually, as a collective, and externally by those working closely alongside members.

To understand what consulting and advising in a public inquiry meant for members of the VSCP, a qualitative participatory action research design was employed. PAR as a methodology can be both praised and criticised for prioritising "voice and everyday experiences" as constructions of knowledge among individuals and stakeholders in communities (Young, 2006, p501). Valuing 'voice' without a shift away from binary researcher/researched narratives and towards a co-creation of knowledge which is led by and shaped from communities' interests, can perpetuate existing power imbalances evident in academic research (Hawkins, 2015; De Oliveria, 2023). As PAR is a method of inquiry deriving from critical and liberation paradigms, it strives to decentre attention away from the academic/clinical researchers, and instead prioritise connecting the individual with the collective (Ratner, 2019). Thus, awareness of the implicit and explicit ways in which power

imbalances can reproduce disparities of power, required co-facilitators to encourage and agree upon a democratic, respectful, and open process throughout the collection and analysis to minimise the potential for this (Hawkins, 2015), with the hope that all members of the research team would feel confident to share their insights and perspectives.

This method often evokes group emotion and processing of collective trauma, in efforts to mobilise and create social change (Malherbe, 2018). PAR was thus deemed the most appropriate design to achieve this, as it focuses on “relationships first, research second” (Cornish et al., 2023, p3) as a key principle. This ethos was essential in building a trustful, egalitarian, and curious space between the scholar researchers and the VSCP. PAR identifies that trust and trustworthiness of scholar researchers can be a barrier to adopting an action-research design (Herr & Anderson, 2014). However, in this research project, two of the four scholar researchers (DT and SF) had worked directly with the at IICSA. Therefore, relationships had been established, and a prior understanding of the positionality of these researchers encouraged members that a disruption of traditional power dynamics between academic and participants could be minimised in this project.

Context and value are pertinent to qualitative participatory methods of inquiry (Cornish et al., 2023). This includes understanding that the participant-researchers’ and respondents’ frame of reference and the interplay between collaborating participant-researchers and scholar-researchers are shaped by their settings and worldviews (Rahman, 2008). Thus, setting an epistemic framework by which the multiple lenses of the action research team and the IICSA staff participants can be explored was pivotal. This included my own positionality as part of the action research team and as a scholar-researcher producing this thesis. My lens throughout this project has been influenced by my personal and professional experiences, particularly my interest in trauma, feminist ideas and critical theories, and how this influences social and psychological spaces. My feminist critical lens of psychosocial structures is shaped from a previous degree in sociology, and prior professional experiences of observing how health and social care systems interact with VS of relational trauma such

as CSA, particularly female VS. Notably, clinicians and services, in trying to help, can at times perpetuate betrayal from institutions, retraumatise, or further marginalise individuals.

I do not have direct experience of how this may operate in contexts, such as public inquiries, which influence government policy. However, meaningful co-production as a praxis, and participatory action-based approaches are paramount to my moral principles. How this might apply in clinical practice is also important to me: fostering curiosity and embracing multifaceted perspectives of psychosocial issues are central (Norstrom et al., 2020). As a white, female, trainee clinical psychologist, I was mindful that my voice in the profession of psychology is a dominant one. Holding this in mind, I aimed as a member of the action research team to decentre myself from traditional 'expert' led forms of knowledge generation that can perpetuate power imbalances in some social structures, such as scholar research, or Eurocentric evidence-based practice which dominate my field of practice.

Using focus group workshops and qualitative interviewing encouraged construction of a reality whereby multiple roles of participant-researchers were enabled. Knowledge was developed around consultant survivorship as a concept, and how victims and survivors negotiated the sphere of public inquiries. This strategy was guided by PAR principles that seek to identify, decipher and speak to complex systemic difficulties (McIntyre, 2008). This approach also sought to understand the meanings for both participant-researchers and IICSA staff working alongside them to enrich the understanding of the multiple worldviews operating within The Inquiry's context. The three-dimensional examination of a lived experience panel therefore encouraged a deeper interpretation, looking at both the psychological processes and the social constructions, such as their feelings, their thought processes, how actions were taken, and belief systems associated with this.

This PAR approach adopted a reflexive thematic method of analysis. As this method is not bound to a specific paradigmatic orientation, it allowed researcher flexibility in application. It was also helpful in identifying, analysing, and grouping repeated patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In its application, it explores individual and group experiences, and

aims to understand psychological and social meanings (Joffe, 2011). Using a reflexive thematic analysis with this research design also enabled the researchers to explore power dynamics, and conduct their investigation in ways that emphasised voices of individuals or groups that have been systematically marginalised (Kiger & Vapiro, 2020). This was important, as in this context, participatory action research seeks to address injustices faced by victims and survivors (Mooney et al., 2023).

3.3. Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to create the PAR group. The action research team comprised 11 individuals, including all VSCP members at the time of IICSA's conclusion in October 2022. VSCP members met with Psychologists Dr Danny Taggart and Dr Stephanie Ford, who had both worked at The Inquiry in a clinical capacity, to discuss forming an action research team to understand and document their experiences. They were joined by Sociologist and expert in Child Abuse Inquiries and survivor activism, Associate Professor Katie Wright from La Trobe University, and myself, Clinical Psychology Doctoral student, Hannah Griffin. As an action research team, and in collaboration with The Survivor's Trust, external funding was sought. A central tenet of PAR is that participant-researchers are equal stakeholders and involved throughout; thus, it was important that the co-researchers were paid to provide their expertise. The team was awarded a grant of £15,000 from the University of Essex's Participatory Research Fund, via Research England. This covered two days' accommodation, food, and travel of all members, and paid VSCP members for their time. Research assistants SF and LD were also paid for their assistance with data collection and two subsequent data analysis days of the focus group workshops.

3.3.1 Setting

Focus group workshops were held 17-18th April 2023 at the University of Essex. All 11 research team members attended. Nine of the 11 members were in physical attendance,

with two of the VSCP members attending virtually via a Zoom link. The scholar researchers organised the layout of the room into a boardroom arrangement, to encourage open discussion. A laptop and projector allowed for the in-person members to easily see and communicate with virtual members.

To allow for discretion and comfort, the individual interview component of data collection was conducted online on Zoom. The interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time to both the participant-researchers and academic researchers. Prior to the interview, participant-researchers were encouraged to be located somewhere comfortable, and likewise, the researchers ensured that they were situated somewhere quiet and discrete for confidentiality purposes. Additionally, to account for accessibility needs, individuals were asked if any reasonable adjustments, such as being given a written copy of the interview questions, were required prior to the interview.

3.3.2. *Sampling technique and size*

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the PAR team and the IICSA staff working closely with the VSCP. This was achieved by speaking directly with the VSCP. Scholar researcher (DT) provided details of the potential research project, including outlining the initial aim of the research, and what being part of the research team would involve. All seven members of the VSCP and four scholar researchers comprised the PAR team. Data collection involved a series of three-hour focus group workshops with all members of the PAR team. A sample of 13 individuals were recruited for the interviews. This included the seven VSCP members, one previous VSCP member, and five IICSA staff members.

The justification for purposive sampling is to acquire a number of individuals who have in-depth knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). Therefore, creating a PAR team from members who were appointed in a unique capacity as a lived experience consultancy panel to IICSA enhanced the co-creation of direct

insights that were rich and invaluable (Palmer, 2020). It also provided perspectives of participation in inquiries from those who have worked through and pieced together institutional failures to protect them.

3.3.3. Materials

The research required participant-researchers and staff participants to have access to a laptop or PC with a camera, and internet for the purpose of interview via video call. A set of predetermined standardised open-ended questions were used. Participant information sheets were created and provided, detailing the agreed aims and purpose of the research, what collaboration and involvement entailed, their rights as participant-researchers, how their data would be used and stored, confirmation of ethical approval, and confidentiality.

A consent form was also provided to the participant-researchers and staff participants. These were returned and signed by all individuals prior to the focus group workshops and interviews. Following the interviews, an online space was provided if participant-researchers wanted to ask further questions or offer reflections. Contact details for the researchers if participants and participant-researchers wished to withdraw their data or seek further information were located on the participant information sheet.

As participant-researchers were paid members of the team during the data collection and analysis process, their identification documents were required for payment purposes. Lunch and refreshments were also provided for the PAR team for the two workshop days. During the focus groups, in order to conduct the initial data collection task which shaped the focus groups, pens, different coloured post-it notes, and flip-chart paper were collected and assembled. This encouraged the team to embrace creative tasks, and honour the processing of experiences from a developmental and trauma-informed practice which embraces the diverse ways in which information is processed by trauma-survivors (Wang &

Burris, 1997).

3.4. Research Procedure

Initial conversations were held with VSCP members who responded to an email from scholar-researcher DT, proposing the parameters of the potential research, and to determine their interest. Additionally, individuals who worked alongside the VSCP at The Inquiry were also considered as suitable. This helped to understand how consulting-survivor panels were viewed through multiple lenses. Once all participant-researchers were happy to proceed as a PAR team, a two-day workshop of focus groups, and supplementary semi-structured interviews were conducted from April to August 2023.

The primary stage of the procedure involved a series of three focus groups as an analytic research team. The workshops were codesigned in partnership between the scholar-researchers alongside one participant-researcher. It was collectively decided that a developmental exploration of experiences at IICSA would be an ideal way to document the individual and collective perceptions of their experiences as a consulting survivor panel. This was supplemented by a task, asking each member to document key events or memories at IICSA. These were written on uniquely colour-coded post-it notes, and placed by VSCP members on the relevant year, to prompt and facilitate group discussion (see image 1). The focus group discussions were primarily facilitated by one scholar-researcher (DT). Explorative questions or reflections that organically developed from the discussion were also asked by other scholar-research members (KW, HG, SF). Each focus group concentrated on one of three distinct areas: the first half of The Inquiry, examining the Civil Service's aim for centring survivor knowledge at IICSA, and finally the latter stages including endings and reflecting on their collective contributions.

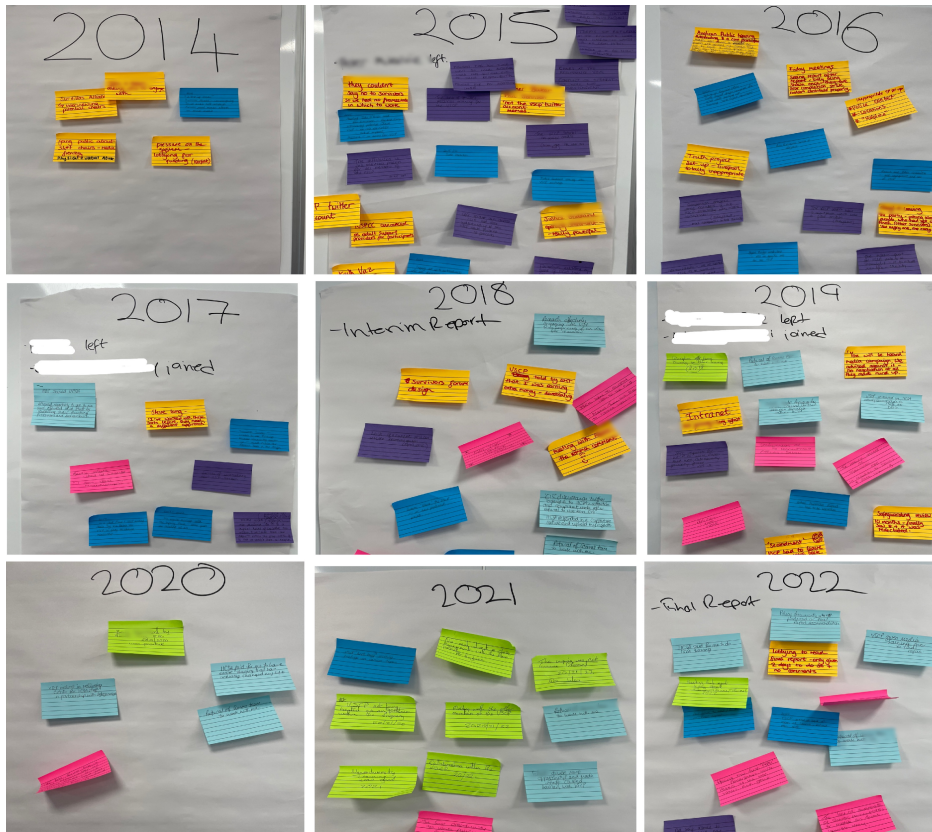


Image 1. *The primary focus group task: A developmental trajectory of key moments for the VSCP at IICSA*

As a core part of the research process, participant-researchers offered their insights and feedback on initial findings and co-created initial concepts that developed from the raw data of the focus group workshops. This was important, as not only did it improve the validity of findings, it allowed for a collaborative and agentic approach to understanding survivorship and public inquiries. This approach is needed, given the recurrent disparity between participant-researchers' desire to have active involvement with the aim to enrich policy and prevent future harm, and the subsequent lack of policy recommendations adopted. Therefore, depicting accurately the reflections of individuals who are experts by the nature of their living experiences was paramount.

The individual interview process differed as collectively agreed with the PAR team, to preserve confidentiality of individual members. As knowledge is co-produced during the interviews, a narrative, open approach was taken with participant-researchers. It encouraged

members to share their narratives, loosely guided by interview questions, allowing for a more mutual exploration of their personal experiences. The PAR team opted for online interviews. This was necessary due to varied locations of VSCP members, IICSA staff, and scholar-researchers, and to create an accessible and convenient space for which participant-researchers and IICSA staff could share their experiences.

The PAR team aimed to gather knowledge guided by an interview schedule co-developed with a VSCP member (LD). This grouped questions, obtaining information into four broad sections. It involved a set of open-ended questions that aimed to invoke reflections on the process of participation at IICSA within the context of a consultancy panel, agency within their unique lens of survivorship and personhood at IICSA, and views on prospective social transformation. This enabled comparable findings to illustrate the breadth and depth of the participant-researchers' experiences, and their intersubjective location within the self and wider contexts. By exploring the process and appraisal of participation, including challenges, facilitative experiences, and reflections post-appointment, it allowed the research team to understand the meanings ascribed to the nuanced inter- and intra-dynamics of the consultative role and the wider inquiry system.

The interview for IICSA staff followed a similar format. Each guide was co-created between a scholar-researcher with a VSCP member, using a developmental foundation and structure. It aimed to understand reasons for joining IICSA as a staff member, their own motivations, and unique perspectives into their experiences at IICSA. The PAR team sought to gain a multiplicity of staff views, assuming that personal insights would be unique to everyone who had worked with the VSCP, owing to their varied positions and roles at IICSA. Staff perspectives were explored ecologically: from their own position interacting with the VSCP, to how their professional department worked with or viewed the VSCP at various points throughout The Inquiry, their relationship with other departments who also worked alongside the VSCP, and finally, their opinions of how The Inquiry as an institution operated with a lived experience panel. The multiple layers gave staff an opportunity to consider the

various dynamics from an intersubjective position. It also allowed staff to reflect on different domains of knowledge operating at IICSA, such as survivor knowledge and Civil Service workstreams. As desired in PAR approaches, pluralism is emphasised to understand multiple perspectives and overcome systemic obstacles that community stakeholders may face (Cornish et al., 2023). This was deemed important in providing varied insights into motivations for working at IICSA and understanding how they may align or differ with members of the VSCP.

3.5. The Reflexive Analytic Process

The transcription and coding process took a two-fold approach, as the group analytic process differed from that of the individual interviews. Confidentiality was reviewed at the initial stage of the focus group workshops, and participant-researchers favoured a confidential interview process. Members had a private space to process and share intersubjective experiences at IICSA, and their transcripts were only held and reviewed by the individual participant-researcher and three members of the academic research team (DT, HG, KW). Initial interview coding was undertaken by HG and reviewed by research team members. Each participant read and edited their individual transcripts prior to the process of coding. This ensured that participant-researchers had ownership of their transcript, and that it accurately reflected their words and experiences.

The focus group analysis was a collective endeavour. This involved an iterative process of analytic action, group reflection, revision, and back to further analysis. Initial audio recordings of focus group workshops were transcribed by HG and sent collectively to the PAR team for feedback as to their personal or group contributions. Two days of data analysis, using reflexive thematic analysis were conducted in-person with a sub-group of the action research team. The sub-group included four members of the action research team, one VSCP member employed as a research assistant (LD) and three scholar-research members (DT, HG, SF). The sub-group inductively coded manifest and latent themes of

focus group workshop day 1 and 2. This was visually represented as a creative process by the group to map out the emerging ideas, themes, and poignant codes deriving from the data (see image 2 and 3). The initial analysis developed was presented to the PAR team to garner reflections and supplement analysis. This was important as co-designing research that is truly participatory must mean that participant-researchers are central to the decision-making process (Palmer, 2020), including reflections in the feedback meetings, and further revising to account for the expertise of the group. Subsequently, this collaborative analytic process informed the main research outputs, including the co-authored academic journal article (Taggart et al., in prep), report and recommendations (Wright et al., 2023), detailing learnings for future government public bodies, and this thesis.

Image 2. A visual representation of analysis from focus group workshop day 1.

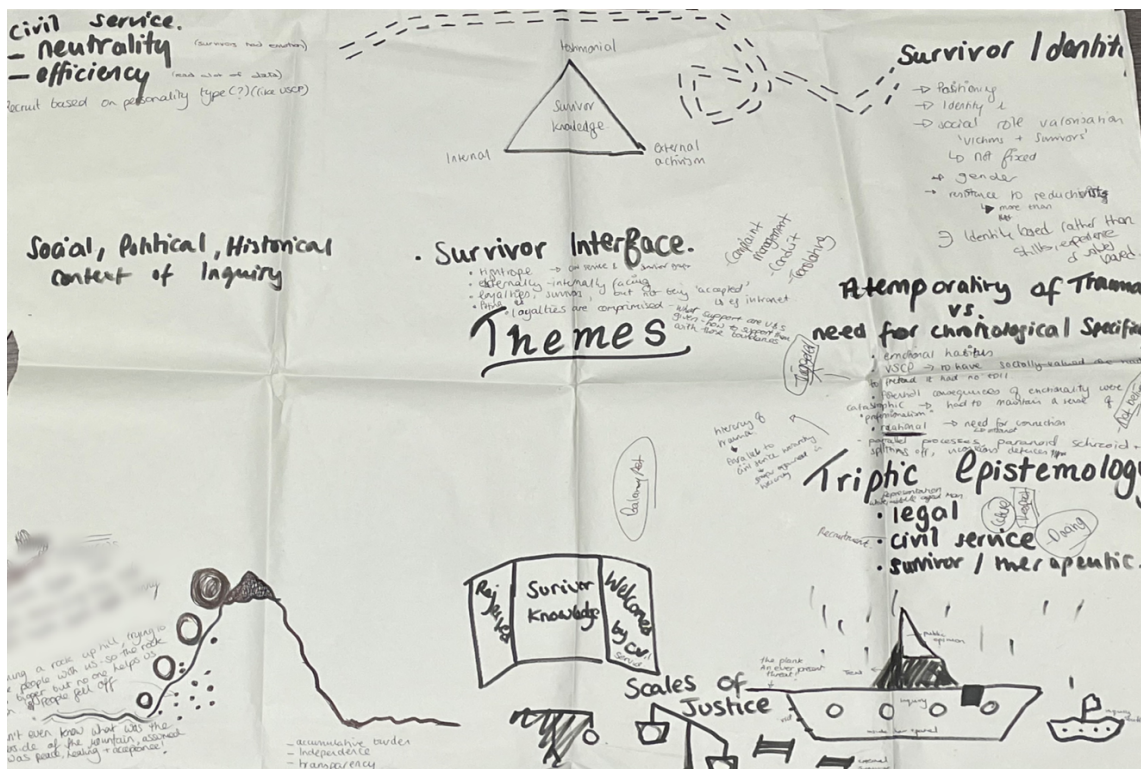
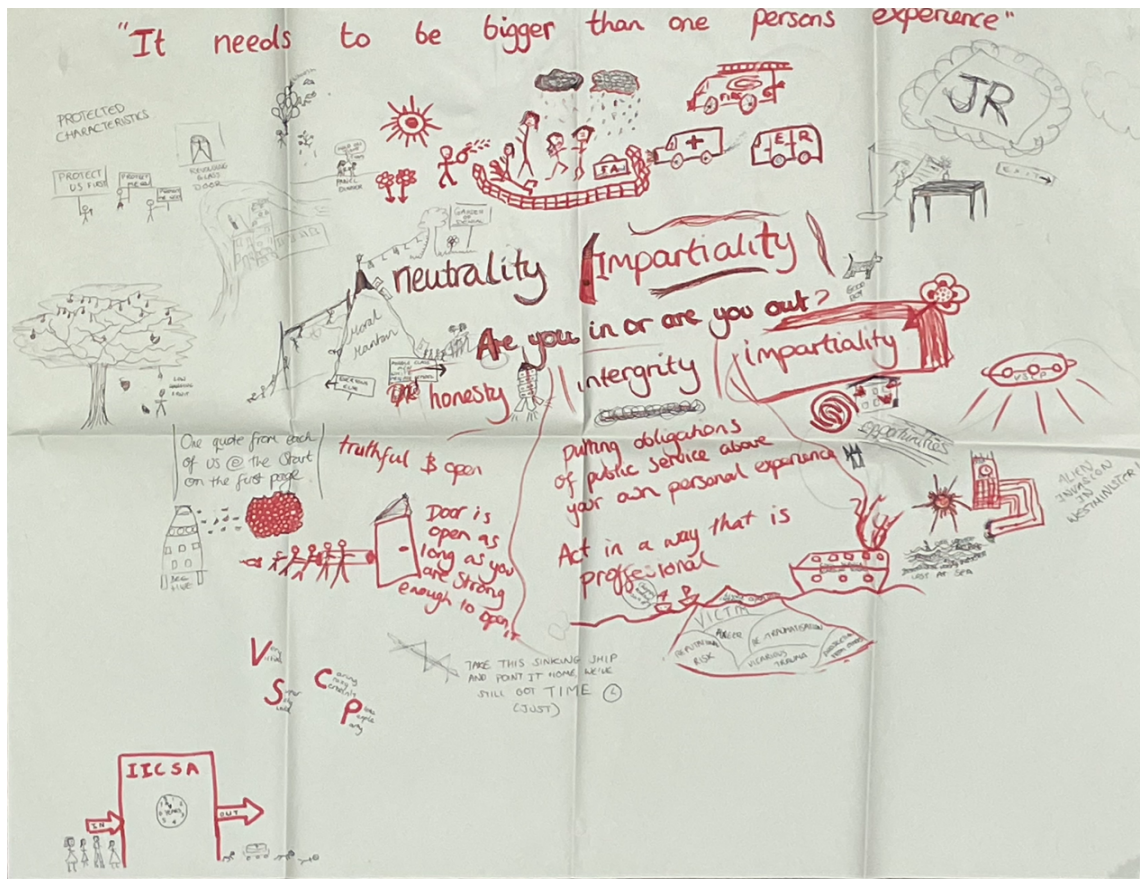


Image 3. Visual representation of the inductive analysis from focus group workshop day 2.



Individual interviews followed a different methodological process. It was agreed that the transcripts would be anonymised within the research outputs, such as a journal article, thesis, and recommendations documents. Therefore, individual interview data could not be analysed as a collective. For the analytic process to retain qualitative methodological rigour, individual interview data from VSCP members and staff was analysed using the six-step process of Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis (TA). This phased process involved: 1) familiarising yourself with the dataset, 2) coding, 3) generating initial themes, 4) developing and reviewing themes, 5) refining, defining, and naming themes, and 6) writing up. This was not a linear process and involved moving back and forth between stages until a cohesive narrative of individual and collective experiences were formed.

Interviews were transcribed, and data familiarisation was further achieved by re-reading and listening to the interview audio, making notes on the patterns across the interview data

set. It also included my general observations and reflections from each interview. Transcripts were reviewed individually with each VSCP member, creating opportunity for members to qualify and clarify their individual data. Transcripts were then coded to capture and understand various meanings across interviews. Data codes were then grouped to the next stage of the reflexive TA process, which generated initial themes by identifying patterns in data across the VSCP members and IICSA staff interviews which had similar or divergent meanings within the same area. Patterns of codes were reviewed, and themes were developed and refined into overarching and sub-themes, depicting key tenets of the VSCP's individual experiences as members of the consultative panel at IICSA, and how this aligned or diverged from IICSA staff's experiences of working with the panel. This was reviewed separately and compared with the emergent group analytic themes, examining the ways collective experiences aligned and/or differed.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was received by the University of Essex Ethics Sub-committee 2, application number ETH2223-0879 (see appendix). The process of obtaining ethical approval for the research project was a joint endeavour between scholar-researchers DT, KW, and me (HG). The application focused on key areas, identifying, and planning potential ethical considerations across the recruitment, data collection, and analysis stages, whilst also acknowledging that this is a participatory action project, and the principles of data collection and analysis are not linear, and reliant on reflexivity (Cornish et al., 2023).

When considering ethics during data collection, a desired aim was that the focus groups could provide a positive opportunity to review and process collective achievements of the VSCP, along with personal and professional challenges. This aimed to be trauma-informed, to avoid and minimise the potential for power imbalances across the research team (Wood, 2019). It was a co-designed and co-facilitated process in collaboration with the VSCP, with

choice of setting (virtual or in-person), accessibility needs were planned for and considered throughout both the focus groups and individual interviews, and members were paid for their expertise. Moreover, it encompassed PAR principles of an iterative, action-oriented process whereby all members reflected and identified learnings to inform recommendations for future lived experience panels (Kemmis et al., 2014).

As part of the Ethics Committee approval, a risk and mitigation analysis was conducted by the researchers. This included considerations of how to mitigate risk to the participant-researchers. In exploring the ways in which VSCP members experienced and appraised their appointment at IICSA, we acknowledged that participant-researchers may experience unexpected emotions associated with recalling experiences. Whilst the research did not ask questions that could cause psychological distress, asking participant-researchers to reflect on their involvement could generate discomfort. Expression of and processing of emotion was welcomed. It was considered a way to process participant-researchers' experiences at IICSA, and not an indication of risk. However, to support any unexpected arising of distress, the mitigation plan included that participant-researchers had the option to leave the room during the focus groups, and regular breaks were scheduled, allowing people to decompress if needed. The option for breaks or debriefs after individual interviews were offered if anything arose. Potential risk of distress to the researchers was also accounted for during this analysis. This included the option to use a debriefing reflective space between researchers following interviews, use of a trauma-specific research supervisory group, and appropriate institutional wellbeing support was accessible.

Information sheets were provided by email detailing the aims of the research and the purpose of their participation (see appendix). It included what collaboration may look like for both VSCP members and IICSA staff participants, detailing how focus group and interview data would be collected, where their data would be stored, and their right to retract or withdraw. Information about travel expenses and financial compensation for their involvement was also detailed. Information sheets were emailed to staff-participants

alongside a consent form prior to the interview (see appendix). This gave sufficient time for individuals to be fully aware of what their involvement would entail and their rights prior to, and after, consenting to participate.

Confidentiality and data protection were key considerations throughout this research. Information collected during the process of this research was protected in line with GDPR protocols. This included reviewing with the PAR group as a collective their views on whether they would like their quotes to remain confidential or be identifiable as participant-researchers during the focus group workshops. It was agreed that as members would be co-authors on the academic journal output, that as a collective they could be identifiable by their work status as either members of the VSCP, or an IICSA staff member. Otherwise, personal information from the participant-researchers and staff participants were removed to ensure individual anonymity. If there was the potential that a member could be identified via a quote, this was qualified with the member first.

This process included members pre-approving, reviewing, and editing their quotes as appropriate for them. This was a consistent process across relevant research outputs, such as the co-authored academic paper, and this thesis. Transcriptions and audio recordings were stored in an encrypted folder to maximise data protection, with three members of the academic research team having access (HG, DT, KW). Raw data will be securely retained for future research and will be safely removed ten years post-publication. Members of the PAR team were also made aware that consent will be sought for use of their data in any future research separate from this study.

4. Results

To gain a shared and full appreciation for the experiences of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel during their appointment at The Inquiry, information was drawn from three focus group workshops. This occurred across two days, and membership included the participant-researchers, all seven members of the VSCP who stayed at IICSA until the end of The Inquiry, and the academic research team. Supplementing this was insights subsequently gathered 13 individual interviews conducted with the seven VSCP members, one previous VSCP member, and six members of staff who worked closely with the VSCP at The Inquiry across a variety of positions.

Upon completing the six-step model of a thematic analysis, six overarching themes and eleven sub-themes emerged from the data:

Table 3.

A Table of Emerging Overarching and Sub-themes

Overarching Theme	Sub-Theme
4.1. Consultant-Survivors: The Personal and Professional Identity	4.1.1. Advocacy, Activism, and Negotiating the Consultative-Survivor Status 4.1.2. The positioning of the panel 4.1.3. Distinguishing individual from collective
4.2. Being Frontline at The Interface: Values and Challenges of a Conduit	4.2.1. The value of a conduit 4.2.2. The pressure of the survivor interface
4.3. The Triptych of Epistemologies	
4.4. The Psychological Contract - Conditions which Shaped the VSCP Appointment at IICSA	4.4.1. The uncertain and evolving role of a consultant-survivor 4.4.2. The Making and breaking of trust
4.5. Responding to the Unbearable - A Collective Trauma	4.5.1. The Effects of a Traumatized Organisation 4.5.2. Parallel Processes Arising at The Inquiry
4.6. Life after IICSA: The Legacy of a Consultant-Survivor	4.6.1. Conclusions and new iterations 4.6.2. Legacy and learnings

Themes highlight the key individual and collective factors and experiences that facilitated integration into the role of a consultant-survivor panel, enabled effective partnerships with IICSA staff, and obstacles faced within The Inquiry.

4.1. Consultant-Survivors: The Personal and Professional Identity

The Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel was a pioneering professional collective. It was the first advisory and consultative panel comprising of individuals sharing their personal and professional experience at an inquiry into CSA. The panel and its members were a key part of the structure of The Inquiry, and the complexity of their role was a key overarching theme. This was discernible in distinct areas: the motivations and values held by members of the VSCP, how they were positioned by others within The Inquiry and by the public more broadly, and how their personal and group perspectives differed or aligned.

4.1.1 Advocacy, Activism, and Negotiating a Consultative-Survivor Status

An essential aspect of the lives of current and previous VSCP members, was the motivation to protect children from harm, highlight the injustice at institutional and social failings, and support anyone dealing with the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse. This was distinctive in the various roles that panel members held prior and during their appointments, supporting and advocating for VS and marginalised individuals across different third-sector, health, and educational organisations. Their alignment with values around social change was also significant for many VSCP members, who in personal and professional lives set to achieve their goals by actively campaigning government. This strategy was instrumentally used by VSCP members and their survivor alliances to successfully push for a statutory inquiry, one which centred around and reflected VS needs.

The VSCP was viewed as essential to the integrity of The Inquiry. One senior IICSA staff member emphasised: “the most important thing was [having] a group of survivors who kept us all honest if we really took a wrong turn.” This meant holding The Inquiry to account from the inside: “I am not afraid to put my head above the parapet. If I hear something isn't right, I will actually call it out” [VSCP member]. Being an activist and fighting justice was core to the identity of some VSCP members. As one person said: “people who have political activism in their background, and understand what activism means... it will be part of the person. It's not separate. You can't shut you down.” This was a dilemma for those members, who at times felt disempowered by being limited in their agency and suppressing aspects of themselves, owing to the formal structures of IICSA. Members acknowledged that activism is “received in a particular way” in public spheres, and thus, the challenge to adapt was substantial when working from within The Inquiry: “We're used to lobbying and campaigning. And then I'm in this... environment where I've got hold back on the lobbying and campaigning... That was quite difficult” [VSCP member].

Other members took a different, less vocal approach to working towards social change. For such individuals, their professional positions had not previously required or even discouraged a divulgence of their status as a VS of CSA. Whilst some felt comfort and a sense of liberation in being able to share this aspect of their identity, this posed a quandary for others, as applying to the VSCP activated a process of publicly ‘coming out’ as a survivor. A concern arose that this could undermine their professional credibility:

Up to that point I had very actively decided not to, to make any public proclamation about my own survivor status just one way or the other, because my experience of seeing the way that survivors got treated in public, particularly in kind of governmental circles, led me to believe that it would work against me in terms of eroding what people's assumptions about my [professional] competence was [VSCP member].

This epitomised a shared concern among many of the panel that the VS identity would consume other aspects of their personhood, including their professional expertise,

and that their experiential knowledge would be viewed in equal regard or validity: “I might not have a degree in this stuff, but I've experienced it, and I do have some knowledge about it, and it's how much you value that knowledge” [VSCP Member]. Therefore, the appointment process could be daunting, requiring a visible and exposing presence, as one member reflected: “It was quite a shock coming into the inquiry, and not realising the expectation of, of how ‘out’ you are as a survivor.”

The appointment process revealed various valued positions held by members in their drive to sharing expertise and towards justice for VS at IICSA. Upon appointment, approaches were agreed and adopted among the panel, stipulating that the VS experience of CSA is diverse and multifaceted. Thus, a wider perspective was required, rather than solely sharing their personal experiences. A member reflected: “It needs to be bigger than one person’s experience... you need to broaden it out so that the, the whole picture is seen, rather than just one experience.” This approach was echoed by another member, who added: “you have to understand the system that you're in, and understand what you're trying to change.” Navigating between individuals, VS groups, and public organisations to share expertise was particularly welcomed. This role could not be fulfilled by other survivors or professionals at IICSA, as one senior civil servant described:

[we] did not want survivor civil servants, [we] wanted people that had really understood what was worrying the survivor community in general... which is why so many [VSCP members] had led survivor groups. Because [they] had a much wider view than [their] own perspective as a survivor.

Using their combined specialist knowledge and skills, this distinctiveness was effective at providing a bridge between the wider survivor community’s needs and interests, and Inquiry staff.

4.1.2. *The Positioning of the Panel*

The politics of visibility surrounding collective survivor identity and alliances is recognised as a powerful mechanism for gaining media and government attention (Whittier, 2009). Survivor groups were perceived as wielding considerable power and influence. As one member stated: “I honestly think [we were appointed] because we were so vocal as survivor groups, not us as individuals. I think they [Inquiry staff] saw the power of activists and thought we better keep them close.” This proximal positioning continued at times throughout The Inquiry and was experienced by some members of the VSCP as an indication that the panel that were seen as somewhat dangerous and needed appeasing, due to the anticipated consequences of their public influence.

Some staff expressed an eagerness to work alongside a panel that had both lived experience and professional expertise: “they have something, that knowledge and experience and skills that don’t exist within The Inquiry”. This position of difference from the civil service was also echoed, portraying the panel’s value as having: “different approaches to work, but obviously are subject specialists.” Alongside this, however, was a felt anxiety at the unfamiliarity of assimilating such skillsets that academic and theoretical experience could not reach. As such, this unfamiliarity led to an experience of separateness due to their status as VS at the Inquiry:

There was this fear of us being survivors... they almost gave us a different status. They put us on a bit of a pedestal, which to us then seemed like they were excluding us from everything. But I don't think that that was intentional. I think it was they didn't have a clue how to work with survivors.

This perceived lack of knowledge or experience by many staff resulted in hesitancy in engagement with the panel, due to a fearfulness of their perceived fragility. One staff member reflected upon The Inquiry’s concern surrounding this: “I think that was, that was a big fear of...there was a lot of focus on the VSCP’s wellbeing. And I think, a paranoia, I'd

say, of causing any, you know, adverse impact on [their] wellbeing.” Such instances, however, were experienced as disempowering by the VSCP.

Members of the VSCP felt devalued when they were viewed solely by their identity as survivors, rather than as a whole person that possessed a professional unique skillset. A VSCP member articulated the challenge of this positioning:

The issue with inquiries or any investigative body and a constituent number of people who have experienced the thing that they are investigating... is that you're so focused on the experience of that person that you forget that actually they are a whole person. That the people who are coming into those roles bring identities much wider than simply the ones that you choose to invest them with or might be useful to you.

Senior leaders within IICSA acknowledged they had positioned an important delineation between types of survivor knowledge, explaining:

I think there is a real difference in role between a professional group of survivors whose advice is internal, and consulting with survivors more generally to touch base and make sure that there's a wider understanding and a wider sharing of The Inquiry's work.

However, there was less understanding of the potential emotional impact this delineation could have on panel members feeling separated from VS spaces. A VSCP member recalled staff at IICSA periodically privileging certain channels of survivor knowledge: “it sometimes felt as though, as the VSCP, we might say something which would be ignored, but if the Survivors' Forum said something, then that would carry more weight.” These experiences of feeling reduced to certain areas of their identity and excluded from others, consequently compounded feelings of alienation. This left some members feeling that staff, at times, perceived them as primarily serving bureaucratic expediency: “We were just the VSCP that has to be there just because it's a tick box. So, in the end we felt really devalued.”

The impact of this was acknowledged, with an IICSA staff member explaining the lack of interaction between Inquiry staff and the VSCP resulted in a feeling amongst the

panel that their insights were not held in as high regard, “they felt... possibly the rest of The Inquiry didn’t take the VSCP very seriously.” As such, endeavours were made by secretariat staff to actively increase the how the VSCP was viewed and valued by other staff, “the main thing was ... managing the perception of the VSCP from within The Inquiry.” One way this was achieved was by formalising the infrastructure around the VSCP’s meetings with other departments. In practice, formalising was determined as creating a more structured culture of meetings, whereby staff requested and scheduled meetings in advance, preparing briefs for their meetings with the VSCP. In turn, this created a demand for their insights, with a staff member describing it as “a wake up call” for Inquiry staff, who had previously assumed they could “just pop in at any time”, and as a result “it changed the way people interacted with the VSCP.”

4.1.3. *Distinguishing Individual from Collective*

A pertinent tenet of the VSCP’s personal and professional identities at The Inquiry, was the alignment and frictions associated with balancing personal perspectives and aims for IICSA with their collective stance as a panel. The Inquiry’s leadership team depicted their desire for the VSCP to present as a cohesive unified voice. As a senior staff member stated:

What do you want to consult a survivor group on? You need them to be survivors, and [they] need to be able to come to a collective decision... I just need to know what [they] all think collectively. What I can't do is go back to the [Inquiry’s chair and] panel with eight different views.

This was accepted as a useful working model for IICSA staff, and one which strengthened the identity of the VSCP. A process of collective decision making was also important for the panel, as one member explained, “regardless of what you want to do, you have to get a consensus in the end... And we still work by consensus now. If more than half agree, we go with it.” This was seen as an effective strategy when advocating for particular ways of working, or expressing areas of concern. Staff noticed the efficiency of the VSCP’s cohesive

messaging, and the power this held within The Inquiry, “in many ways it was a good way of working, because they were very good at backing each other, you know, and standing collectively on issues.”

Whilst identification as a panel was advantageous in exerting influence and interacting with staff on workstreams, other civil servants working at The Inquiry identified the implications of this for members of the panel. One reflected:

The VSCP itself isn't a single entity... it became kind of like a single personality. When, in fact, there were very different personalities in the same group, all with different strengths and weaknesses... it was important to have empathy, to understand the complexity.

This observation aligned with barriers shared by VSCP members. There was a general agreement about the benefit of the panel's identity. However, some members expressed that the unspoken expectations for a homogenisation of VS viewpoints became an obstacle:

Even now, we're seen as a group. And it's an issue. Just because we've all experienced a crime... it doesn't mean that we all think the same, act the same, have the same skills. And organisations still don't get that.

Members concurred with the internal difficulties arising from posing as a united group externally to the inquiry. At times, the requirement for a collective position among a plural and diverse group of individuals with interests and expertise shaped by their personal and professional contexts created unwanted tension. During these moments, disappointment or frustration could occur, as members felt conflicted by the pressure to represent the multitude and varying voices of VS, and also aware that their personal perspectives and interests may not be fully aligned with the collective response to The Inquiry, with one member noting:

The dynamics, were completely left for us to deal with... And sometimes not in a really healthy way... you've got a bunch of survivors in the room, and for some reason The Inquiry has been so blinded to think that... we will agree, and all do the same thing.

VSCP members also reflected on the intimidation of the collective panel for some staff. This intimidation meant individual panel members were sought out separately, possibly to minimise the threat of any persecutory feelings arising in negotiating work or feedback with the panel, resulting in development of individual relationships. Whilst this dynamic may have increased individual collegiate relationships, the development of relationships between staff and individual members created internal comparisons, and a threat to the harmony of the panel.

4.2. Being Frontline at the Interface: The Values and Challenges of a Conduit

One central aspect of the VSCP's role was being a visible mediator between The Inquiry, its staff, and external survivor stakeholders. The panel felt a dual responsibility to protect The Inquiry and to voice victims' and survivors' concerns and needs. This emerged in two subthemes: 'the Value of a Conduit', and 'The Pressure of the Survivor Interface'. Being a conduit was a valued aspect of the consultative responsibilities, whereby the panel was able to streamline communication to increase survivor engagement or convey bilateral concerns. However, this role could be contentious at times. The VSCP's visibility and frontline position at IICSA resulted in the panel and/or its members becoming a target for many victims and survivors to project their anger and anxieties towards The Inquiry.

4.2.1. *The Value of a Conduit*

A conduit, characterised as an individual or group of individuals who act as a bridge or channel to amplify subjugated voices and have their contributions valued (Lambert et al., 2021) was a role of significance for the VSCP. Prior to their roles in IICSA, for many past

and present VSCP members, advocacy and weaving groups of VS together to effect policy change was crucial. This position, therefore, was a natural extension of their previous work and a role of importance to the VSCP. It was also recognised as essential by The Inquiry's staff, who were aware of their limited knowledge in the area, with one senior civil servant recalling: "the tricky bit is they also have to learn how the survivor bit works, and that's the bit that we didn't know." Thus, it was understood that the success of IICSA relied on the experiential knowledge and testimony of VS, inside and outside the Inquiry.

As such, VSCP members were assigned key jobs, such as group facilitators in Survivor Forum events and strategy advisors. A core responsibility for them was to find ways in which to demonstrate publicly that IICSA could be useful, and a benign figure for VS, with one member stating:

what they [IICSA] didn't get was the trust that needed to be built with victims and survivors. I knew that the Inquiry, to be successful, needed the voices of victims and survivors. But victims and survivors, are genuinely scared of institutions. Why would we share what we've been through with you?

Considering this, members explored ways in which they could transparently endorse and inform VS of processes, such as The Truth Project whereby they could be heard: "I knew [it] was fantastic because I've been through it... I also knew that victims and survivors needed their voices heard, and I also knew that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for them to do that."

As a publicly appointed VS panel, members felt a strong responsibility for the welfare of VS in their interactions with IICSA. They highlighted the value of being able to use their voice to advocate from within the organisation, with one member describing that they "held The Inquiry to account on behalf of the survivors, to make sure that survivors had the best journey through The Truth Project." When VS outside of The Inquiry raised concerns or complaints about their experience at IICSA, the VSCP was often identified as a safe bridge

to raise the issues upstream on their behalf. Critically, the emotional tenor of being a mediator when things went wrong at IICSA increased the sense of responsibility the group felt, with a desire to avoid future failings: “I had a lot dumped on me. And I felt an obligation to be a fixer, and to try and solve all of that out. Um, and that really took a toll on my health.”

The VSCP’s aim to increase communication channels between the VS and The Inquiry was at times challenged by disparities in engagement strategies. VS in the public were vocal and passionate, whereas The Inquiry’s communication style involved limited emotional expression, to retreat or be silent to avoid conflict. This was noted by one senior civil servant, who likened historical interactions in government and at IICSA to archetypal analogies of poise and grace: “I know there was this perception that government was ignoring them [VS] ... but there was lots, lots going on. It’s like the swan”. However, affected by the early public objections and subsequent changes to the scope and structure of The Inquiry, there was a looming fear of judicial review from inside IICSA. This compounded the Inquiry’s tendency to withdraw and remain structured in its responses, to manage the organisational anxieties and to minimise additional controversy or failings in the public sphere. The effects of this approach were notable for the VSCP, who feared the consequences of pressure from the media and VS groups, and felt they needed to protect IICSA. The function of protecting the organisation was challenging for the VSCP, but the longer-term vision was to bring restorative justice for VS.

4.2.2 *The Pressure of the Survivor Interface*

The VSCP was positioned at the interface of survivor communities and The Inquiry. Interfaces can be both threatening and facilitative - a balancing act to affect change and enable embattled groups to coexist safely (Jarman, 2004). Inquiries investigating CSA and institutional failings garner intense interest and scrutiny from the public, sparked by horror and outrage. Inquiries are often established in response to public outrage to examine difficult

or contentious social issues and report findings transparently (Wright, 2018). Public scrutiny was evident at IICSA, with the media and VS outside of The Inquiry examining each action and decision taken. IICSA were also aware of the powerful influence of survivors. Thus, the panel was positioned as a visible face for VS: “we were pushed forward, in your faces as survivors” [VSCP member]. However, attached to the visibility was a double-bind: an expectation both from Inquiry staff and external survivor stakeholders that panel members would communicate each of their messages. This led to divided loyalties, with the VSCP being survivor stakeholders, but also paid and appointed by The Inquiry, with one member describing their dilemma: “we’re vocal, but we are also towing the line.” This led to feelings of being on a tightrope, feeling pressured to hold dual positions of both VS stakeholders and IICSA staff, with little margin for error. The difficulty was palpable, as one VSCP member described how this had negatively impacted them: “It just felt it was a constant being in quicksand. Trying to have your voice, trying to do the best you could for the group, for victims survivors collectively... you never knew quite where you stood.”

External VS treated the VSCP with suspicion, envy, and resentment at being asked to represent the diverse needs and experiences of survivors. This left panel members a target of projected fear, anger and pre-empted disappointment of being part of The Inquiry, another organisation that would inevitably fail them:

We got some flack on the way, because there were lots of survivors sitting on the outside waiting for us to expose ourselves, and to give them ammunition, to point out how we were failing them...That participating in this capacity, in this Inquiry, was betraying survivors on some level. [VSCP member]

This ‘flack’ was characterised as: “an awful lot of social media criticism” [VSCP member] towards The Inquiry and particularly the VSCP, who were subjected to targeted personal and collective forms of intimidation. This took an emotional toll, and created nervousness among the panel, who were aware that their interactions at The Inquiry were being viewed under a microscope and could result in public defamation by survivors: “we were

always conscious of how we was going to be perceived... what the fallout was going to be. But they [The Inquiry] never seem to be worried about that.”

Alongside this, the persistent fear of demise held among some departments in The Inquiry, affected how it handled the online attacks towards it and the VSCP. The Inquiry’s strategy was to retreat, or not engage with targeted criticism; whereas this was harder for the VSCP, who had become highly visible public figures in the survivor community: “[IICSA staff] really hadn’t looked at the climate... the sacrifice that this was doing for us. The way our awful media were playing dirty tricks” [VSCP Member]. Inquiry staff were able to retrospectively identify the negative impact their absence had: “I think in the early days, we could have gone out and defended [the VSCP] much more publicly” [IICSA staff].

The lack of protection from the organisation created isolation and conflicted feelings. The impact of conflict was present for numerous members, who shared the long-term goals of IICSA, and could rationalise The Inquiry’s response in that context, yet at times they also felt abandoned and left to navigate hostile working environments alone: “I would say throughout the first, uh, couple of years it was a constant concern, and of course The Inquiry itself was constantly concerned about [the threat of] judicial review. Um so uh yes, there was that feeling of this is quite an unsafe situation and unsafe thing to be involved in, and yet, very much needed.” This dual experience of The Inquiry being both harmful and beneficial for the VSCP remained notable throughout the course of their appointment.

4.3. A Triptych of Epistemologies

A central overarching theme that emerged from the focus groups and individual interviews was that three unique epistemologies were operating at The Inquiry. Epistemology can be defined as how we attempt to understand knowledge, and the conditions for a belief to be constituted or justified as knowledge (Pritchard, 2016). In the case of IICSA, knowledge was being interpreted and typified by three distinctive worldviews:

legal, civil service administration, and survivor epistemology. These often worked and functioned separately, but when they worked together, they displayed a harmonic picture and a cohesive narrative, similar to an artist's triptych. The three epistemologies reflected competing cultures but these ecosystems at times could also work together. At a structural level, the legal, civil service, and survivor epistemologies contended with or dominated one another to determine how IICSA operated in workstreams, between staff/appointments, and how knowledge was validated and produced. At other times, however, the worldviews could compromise to benefit partnership working between the survivor epistemology, which the VSCP represented, and the civil service administration.

Legal epistemology as a field of practice can be defined by a rigorous process, exploring and legitimising standards of proof, examining testimonial or witness evidence to determine what constitutes 'truth' beyond reasonable doubt (Gardiner, 2019). At The Inquiry, legalistic values and practices focused on setting frameworks by which IICSA could operate. As The Inquiry had statutory status, it had legal powers to compel witnesses and provide legal safeguards, however it also increased the rigidity by which investigations could be conducted, as statutory status is classed as formally independent from Government (Cowie, 2022). In practice, this meant that it was a culture influenced by the perception of impartiality and probabilistic reasoning. A senior staff member underscored the importance of ensuring the legal processes characterised by independence were followed to protect The Inquiry's credibility:

In terms of parliamentary scrutiny ... nobody could ask us why we decided to investigate in the way we did, why we called whichever witnesses we did, why we decided to work with survivor groups in the way we did, because that's the part that the Act guarantees is independent.

The emphasis on independence and impartiality was embedded into the structure of The Inquiry, but one which conflicted with a survivor worldview of transparency and egalitarianism, as one IICSA staff stated:

The chair ... can force people to give evidence. They can force people to take the oath. So it's very important that impartiality is baked into that and indeed the Act bakes it in. And so this idea that that was ever going to be, once they were sitting, that there could be regular engagement between the panels, was never going to be the case.

The two panels, the Inquiry's main chair and panel, and the VSCP, therefore operated in parallel but separate from one another. This was demarcated by the fear of legal ramifications, which a staff member recalled as, "my main concern in terms of relationship... was not to allow it to lead to JR [judicial review]."

However, this was unnerving for the VSCP, who were not aware of the need for independence. For VSCP members, this had an othering effect, "it was almost like they weren't allowed to talk to us... It wasn't until the end, I realised that they weren't allowed to, or maybe it would be seen as a conflict of interest." The choice of separation was disputed by members of the VSCP, as one member reflected that the management's perceptions and fear had implications for them: "I think that the interpretation that they chose, it is very much a choice. It allowed them to do what they wanted, which was to keep the VSCP at arm's length." Consequently, this was experienced by some as the VSCP, and its survivor culture, as a danger to The Inquiry's functioning.

The VSCP reflected the survivor epistemology operating at IICSA. This epistemology could be delineated by practices of advocacy, lobbying, justice-oriented principles, and trauma-informed care. The tensions between legal, Civil Service, and survivor epistemologies were clearly evident in the VSCP's interactions with the legal department. Early attempts to integrate the survivor worldview into The Inquiry began with encouragement from senior Inquiry staff for the panel to develop their own terms of reference, with consultation from legal as required. Divergence between Civil Service and legal epistemologies were infrequent, however, in this instance, differing approaches sent inconsistent messages for members. Indications of co-creation in being able to develop terms of reference, put forward by Civil Service staff, were ultimately constrained by rules,

managing perceptions of independence, and processes set out by legal. Subsequently this attempt at integration was viewed as confusing and disappointing for several VSCP members, restricting innovative consideration in how their panel would operate within The Inquiry:

It became very evident that the reams of negative public exposure had been both deeper and more pervasive than I had initially assumed. What we encountered was an organisational response that was so mired in self-protection that it didn't leave a lot of room for creative consideration. [VSCP member]

Others echoed this, that the department's risk-averse approach resulted in limited interactions for the VSCP within IICSA: "It was easier to say no than try" [A VSCP member]. This divergence was notably conflicting for members, who endeavoured to follow their trauma-informed principles of transparency and had also hoped to update VS stakeholders on their involvement, but were being restricted by primary legislation, such as the Official Secrets Act. This amounted to betrayals of trust at times for panel members, who were not advised of the limits of their involvement, and the information that they wouldn't be privy to because of the nature of the Inquiry:

When we were invited to be part of it, 'you're gonna [sic] be part of everything we do' you know, 'involve you in everything', but over time the reality was we were just kept over here, and we weren't told what was going on, and that is very disempowering, and triggering, and traumatising.

The Civil Service is a public service body which, like the legal worldview, has an epistemology premised on independence and impartiality. It is governed by parliamentary interest and aims to operate as a protection against bias for the ministerial department it serves. Civil Service bodies are therefore interested in the values and practices by which its staff follow. Specifically, four core values are defined as essential for civil servants to possess: objectivity, impartiality, integrity, and honesty (Gov, 2015). These are posited as

crucial to live up to the standards of an independent body of knowledge, one which can be used to inform policies and processes irrespective of the government it serves. The Inquiry's workforce largely consisted of civil servants. As such, the dominating practices at IICSA were that of civil service, with their views on how to provide The Home Office with impartial investigation into the truth and failings associated with institutional CSA. One senior civil servant described their opinion on why a Civil Service dominant Inquiry was necessary:

I strongly have the view that secretaries do need to be civil servants, because whether we like it or not, all inquiries, if they're statutory, operate under a Government Act and... so there needs to be somebody there that's saying...to the chair; "You can't do it that way. You have to do it this way" and to Survivors "no that won't work" and to politicians no, "You can't do it that way", 'cause...'cause you'll lose the support of survivors. There has to be somebody in the middle that understands how the government works.

This provided some consultant-survivors, who had spent time interacting with and lobbying government departments, with apprehension. A VSCP member reflected: "I could see that IICSA had been created in the Home Office's image, and I knew what that meant. I knew that it would be like working with a government department". Their apprehension was palpable, due to their position as 'outsiders' to the dominant culture within IICSA, as one member stated: "we're not civil servants. We can't compete with the civil servant world because we were external to it." Members were therefore uncertain about how they may be received.

The Inquiry's leadership team were determined to have VS knowledge at the centre of the investigation of the truth behind institutional child sexual abuse: "I wanted to make sure that, that was driven by what survivors told us was needed, rather than what a bunch of professionals with no experience of that. It'd have been very well-meaning, but it couldn't be informed" [IICSA staff]. However, these values for investigating the truth directly contravened with the nature by which survivor epistemology operates, as one member articulated: "IICSA

civil servants needed to understand the world that they were working in, the landscape that they were working in. Um, and they didn't, because civil servants can be very siloed." For survivors, such as members of the VSCP, questions of objectivity are counterintuitive, as their expertise and knowledge is founded in their subjective experiences. This was an ongoing challenge for the VSCP, who described their insights and recommendations as often not holding equal weight to that of academic or theoretical knowledge produced. This was characterised by instances of testimonial injustice towards survivor-consultants. One member described the frustrations associated with this:

It was a very painful process where, like, four years later, they'd realise what we were saying was right... coming to a meeting and be, like, 'did you know'? And we were like, yeah, yeah we did... it felt a bit like, argh if you just listened.

It was a consistent barrier for the consultant-survivors who were under the impression that their personal and professional insights would be welcomed as valid information, and given the credence it deserves. Consequently, the VSCP experienced this as a devaluation of the credibility of survivor knowledge, and an epistemological injustice they faced within The Inquiry.

Another key feature of the civil service epistemology is its distinct structure. It is notably hierarchical, as an IICSA staff described:

The UK Government and the Civil Service, they love that one person that they need to influence... I mean, that's kind of the way our whole own tier system works... it starts with a monarch, and then there's a prime minister... there's always one person in charge.

Survivor epistemology and individuals who align, however, are often situated in health, social care, and third-sector organisations, with the latter tending to favour an egalitarian approach (Pestoff, 2012), as one member described: "a charity setting ... everybody's seen as equal almost... but in the Civil Service it's very different." This was therefore not a structure that

VSCP were used to working in and found this an uncomfortable process, having to learn the Civil Service rules of engagement in an unfamiliar environment. This also could be retraumatising for some members, being unaware of the potential threats and fearing the unintended consequences of making a mistake:

We are a fish out of water... by the nature of who we are, our experiences, what happened to us. You're putting us into an environment that's, uh, it is like putting a frog into a saucepan really and heating it up as you go along. It's a really strange environment to be in. Um, the protocols, the hierarchical system of it all. Um, I think if you're going to get survivors... of any trauma, I think you need to get those sort of things from the start.

Moreover, the lack of initial training or explanation for VSCP members, specifically on how an Inquiry operates, and the implicit rules and practices of the Civil Service, led members to feel persecuted and alienated at times, as many did not understand the culture dominating the Inquiry:

We were never inducted as to how the processes work. We were never told 'this is how you consult' 'this is how you should feedback'. We were just literally put in a room and they'd come in... it's just so different to how you work in the third sector that it was bizarre that they were expecting us to act like civil servants. [VSCP Member]

The expectations to conform were met with despair. Another panel member agreed with the assumption of conformity by the Civil Service, stating: "you were working with people who... was so used to those protocols. Had it just even been explained, I think we would have been far better about it." Consequently, the lack of initial communication was a central barrier for the integration of the two worldviews.

IICSA staff concurred with the tensions and assumptions of conformity. They described the culture of the Civil Service as: "a very structured environment, very particular way of working. It's kind of inflexible" [IICSA staff member]. The hegemonic practices

experienced by the VSCP, were affirmed in further comments made by the staff member: “I think the barriers arise from the expectation that people who don't work in that system will just adapt to it...and the expectation that they should work with it or not.” Consequently, Civil Service culture could be damaging emotionally at times for the VSCP.

The strategies to communicate with or manage pressures from the public sphere, both the media and VS, differed greatly between the VSCP and The Inquiry. Survivor epistemology favours engaging with and confronting conflict, to understand and process harm experienced. However, government and civil service administrations emphasise a measured neutrality, which meant controlling the narrative, or avoiding conflict altogether. This required an adjustment in strategy for the VSCP, many of whom have advocacy and activism backgrounds, and are used to working with the media as a tool to address concern, or deliver a justice-oriented message. One member articulated the opposing approaches in practice:

It became evident pretty quickly that the reason they [IICSA] were hankering down and not dealing with the media was because that's what Government do... We weren't in that culture. We were from a different place, so we wanted to engage. ... So there was a clash, I think, quite early on.

Differences in rules and practices for communication were also apparent in the way information was conveyed. For VS, direct messages and expression of emotions are welcomed, and central to challenging or conveying significance or impact, whereas, for civil service epistemology, emotionality infringes upon objectivity, impartiality and truth. Moving away from their subjective thoughts and experiences was a difficult experience for VSCP members, as they recalled being asked to limit passion or emotion in expression. As a panel member expressed, this resulted in members feeling:

Quite angry... so that made us difficult to deal with. They didn't understand our anger. From their perspective, they had a job to do, and it didn't involve emotion. And even [IICSA staff] said to us on several occasions: "we need to take the emotion out of it, we've got a job to do, and they won't listen to you if you show too much emotion".

This was problematic for some VSCP members, who were being asked to suppress a central component of themselves. Differing approaches to integrating their emotional expression were adopted in attempts to convey and communicate their perspectives into workstreams and dynamics. At times, emotions that may be aligned with an advocacy focused approach, such as vocal and open expressions of anger, hope, interest, or despair were adopted and could be helpful in directing others to the underscoring of a concern or agreement on topics; whereas at other times, attempts to negotiate and integrate using a quieter, subtle use of emotional expression were preferred and determined as useful by members. A staff member acknowledged the difficulties of imposing a culture of neutrality on a consultant-survivor panel: "it was wrong to kind of contain or remove the emotion from the meetings, because things would be emotional, specific, particularly because of their own life experiences."

However, for civil servants, a lack of emotionality was also synonymous with proficiency and credibility: "the mask, the professional, everyone is seen to be deadpan to get a message across. And the minute there's any emotion in there... it's not very civil service-y" [IICSA staff member]. Thus, senior staff felt that if the VSCP were to have credibility, it was pivotal that some of the culture was assumed: "the key was to professionalise the VSCP... or civil service-izing, The Inquiry's interaction with the VSCP." Furthermore, the distinct lack of emotion at The Inquiry meant that, at times, when VSCP members did express greater emotional responses, it was treated with concern. A staff member noticed that as an organisation, there was: "a big fear of... there was a lot of focus on the VSCP's wellbeing... the over-cautiousness actually, was perhaps more detrimental."

This resulted at times in positioning the VSCP with a victim-status, preventing them from the partnership working The Inquiry aimed to do.

Despite the challenges of adjusting to a new dominating culture of the Civil Service, the VSCP successfully integrated aspects of survivor epistemology into The Inquiry. One staff member recalled the resistance to adopting a hierarchal stance:

The Inquiry wanted the VSCP to have a chair or have a lead person that they could kind of interact with. And they refused to do that. ... In many ways, [it] was a good way of working ... it was quite a flat structure. And, so ... we had a rotating chair for all the meetings.

This was a successful assimilation of survivor epistemology into Civil Service culture. It was also an effective solution for a consulting-survivor panel, some of whom described this as resistance to the inadvertent creation of a marginalising or divisive environment for VS.

Towards the latter stages of The Inquiry, staff and VSCP members agreed a process by which successful dissemination of projects would be achieved, but still reach the survivor ethics of collaboration and consensus. One IICSA staff member spoke about merging of two worldviews: “the VSCP had a very particular way of working, that the collective had to be involved in everything. So it was about marrying up their process, with the kind of project management process to get the best thing out.” In making space for this collaborative process, it integrated both worldviews, and was described as: “the piece that I’m most proud of” by a member of staff.

4.4. The Psychological Contract - Conditions that shaped the VSCP appointment at IICSA

Another focal area that both the VSCP and IICSA staff reflected on were the conditions that fostered or hindered inter-professional alliances between inquiry staff and the VSCP, and between members of the panel. The psychological contract, likened to the psychoanalytic principles of the therapeutic contract between a patient and therapist, is an organisational psychology term that refers to the implicit and explicit expectations, ambitions, obligations, and beliefs held by the employee and employer, which influence the employment relationship (Peters, 2021). Conditions influenced the psychological contract and the development of positive working experiences for the VSCP. These were: the uncertain and evolving role of a consultant-survivor, and the making and breaking of trust. These dynamics were often intertwined and shaped engagement and communication between departments and the VSCP, and among each other.

4.4.1 The uncertain and evolving role of a consultant-survivor

The consultant-survivor role was long advocated for by VS activist and alliances, who devised the panel alongside staff at The Home Office, consulting on different occasions: “to talk about what they needed to do to make it safe and how to really work with survivors, and how to support their staff” [VSCP member]. They identified that with its new status as a statutory inquiry, VS insights and knowledge should be paramount to the Inquiry. Notably, there was an added and key differentiation for IICSA staff, who saw the Inquiry’s success as requiring VS with particular skills to shape the structure and operational functioning of the Inquiry: “I think you needed survivors with proper professional backgrounds who could make sure that the inquiry was asking the right questions.” This determination for a consultant-survivor role was welcomed by VS.

The initial experiences of meeting as an appointed panel were characterised as creating uncertainty, with little understanding of the parameters for which they were operating within. One member noted the confusion for the panel: “I don't think I had the understanding of how an inquiry works... I really didn't know how an inquiry was structured.” Another member described the uncontained dynamic of the first meeting: “we were brought together and put in a room, on our own, with uh no instruction, no induction... I think they just didn't know what to do with us.” Appointed members who worked for or led specialist organisations recalled the additional layer to differentiate: “I didn't know whether I was there as an organisation or myself. So from the very beginning, it should have been clear... sometimes we were survivors, and sometimes we were representatives of organisations in their head” [VSCP member].

In the early stage of The Inquiry, the lack of clarity about their role and responsibilities created unease within the VSCP. Differing perspectives on the scope and remit of their role, initially generated tension among the group. Additionally, the shared lack of knowledge about the socio-political landscape of an inquiry, coupled with limited input from IICSA, increased uncertainty for the panel. One member denoted: “it was never quite clear what was expected of us, because it constantly changed.” This ambiguity heightened anxieties:

The first six to nine months of our existence... [was] spent in a constant state of flux, in which we went back and forth trying to determine what we were expected to do, what we wanted to do, and who we were supposed to ask permission to do it. [VSCP member]

The Inquiry's lack of clarity around the scope of the VSCP's work created a widespread barrier for members. As The Inquiry was in the early stages, the VSCP was seen as an unknown entity for both departments within IICSA, and with the panel itself. In attempts to build connections and trusting alliances, the VSCP sought out the main panel and various departments to develop workstreams; however, meetings across IICSA could be

discouraging, with a hesitancy to meaningfully collaborate. One member recalled that departments were: “on the whole actually, really unwilling to engage with us... because The Inquiry had not created a contained or containable sense of what we were trying to achieve.” This lack of containment created further instability and meant that the VSCP remained anxious and eager to determine how to demonstrate their worth.

Over time, creating a structure and more certainty was essential for facilitating the development of the VSCP’s work. Initiatives were taken to seek out areas using their expertise with a member reflecting: “as the inquiry evolved, because it wasn't clear about our job roles... I took it upon myself to think, where can I add value?” The sense of purpose increased for members, as another member shared the integrative experience of overcoming the uncertainty:

Having no particular remit for like four years was a wee bit of a barrier...We did so well in creating what we could add to the process. We did that ourselves. We found our own place. And in finding our own places in it, we all worked together really well.

This was supplemented by systems that panel members created to organise, monitor work and outcomes. This allowed members to feel more contained in their appointment, and in control of their interactions.

Community and VS stakeholder engagement work were key areas whereby members shared their expertise and shaped essential services, such as VS testimonial listening experiences. This facilitated a usefulness and worthiness that had not yet been experienced, with one member recalling:

It gave more than anything us the opportunity to shine, having not had any opportunity to do so to that point. So it really energised, it really galvanised the group into some collective sense of oh, great! We want to do this... all of those things that that pulled us

into the space of this is what it feels like to be collaborative and useful.

The importance of the work the VSCP created was expanded upon by another panel member:

The Truth Project was a real way to give those survivors the chance to come forward and sit in front of someone that they would see as in authority, and having, you know, a level of responsibility, and to say what had happened. And for me, it was about a chance to contribute in some way to the recommendations, to the understanding that we've got to that, to that body of evidence about survivors and, you know, the way they've been failed.

This depicted the values and motivations driving the VSCP, towards developing restorative experiences and justice-oriented projects at The Inquiry.

During the Inquiry, the secretariat alongside the VSCP changed the infrastructure around the panel, which subsequently professionalised their way of working, focusing their role and interactions with others. Increased structure was also a key facilitator for VSCP members, who reported improved relationships and perceptions of the panel among IICSA staff: "I do think how we were communicated with, to how we viewed, and how we were able as IICSA to communicate to survivors and participants dramatically changed in the last two years" [VSCP member]. This was echoed by secretariat staff member, who felt structure helped the VSCP thrive:

They have something... knowledge, experiences and skills that don't exist within The Inquiry... you've got to... create frameworks and create processes that where they can channel that effectively... and bring and deliver the best of themselves to The Inquiry.

Thus, the VSCP's shaping and distinguishing of the consultancy role, alongside the scaffolding by the secretariat were determined as helpful facilitators that increased the worth and integrated the panel at IICSA.

4.4.2. *The Making and Breaking of Trust*

Trust, is a relational dynamic, one which is conditional on an expectation of the trustee. This is uniquely shaped by both the trustee actions, but shaped by trustor's previous experiences throughout their childhood and adulthood (Alyce, 2023). As such, the dynamic of trust between two individuals, or individuals and institutions, is highly subjective and diverse. Notably, CSA survivors have experienced significant betrayals of trust from both the individual perpetrating the abuse, and various individuals and institutions that have ignored, denied, or dismissed the abuse (Herman, 1992). Therefore, CSA is a significant developmental trauma that has an ongoing impact on the ability to feel safe, close, and trusting of others.

The development of trust was a crucial determinant for the success of The Inquiry. This was particularly pertinent and essential between survivors and institutions, who historically have repeatedly betrayed the trust of VS of CSA. Thus, cultivating open, respecting, and trusting relationships with VS was a key objective of IICSA. The challenge of building trust was apparent for organisations and VS campaigners who had historically challenged governments with little effect. This, for members who joined the VSCP, increased a sense of apprehension and cynicism at working with another potentially unreliable institution who may repeat the denial and neglect of VS. As one member stated:

We're used to the snake oil. We're used to the, you know, the the public attestations of value, of how the work we do is so critical to making sure that this terribly, terribly underrepresented and uniquely affected and traumatised group of people would not

thrive without us. So thank you so much, please go away and stop bothering us. So, that's what we were used to... I think we were all expecting another version of that.

As such, the starting position of trust for VSCP members was to treat the organisation with caution and suspicion. This could mean that hypervigilance allowed the VSCP at times to anticipate or interpret the potential future breaches in trust. One member reflected:

One thing we had in common with the sense of paranoia that actually what The Inquiry was, in some conscious or unconscious way, was waiting for us first to implode, and therefore for them to be relieved of the burden of having to manage us.

This experience resonated with other members, who recalled the combining effects of their personal and professional experiences, as preparing them to be alert to, and protecting from future betrayal or deceit. One member therefore regarded the panel as being a: "group who were highly sensitive to a lot of stuff. To the ways of working... the way we're being treated. You can't gaslight a group like us." This was compounded by the lack of clarity about the role of lived experience consultancy, for both the VSCP and IICSA staff, many of whom had limited experience in working with lived experience panels or survivors of CSA. The effects of this were that relationships between certain departments or individuals and the VSCP were cultivated from a bilateral position of tentativeness. Consequently, the increased level of uncertainty heightened the urge for the VSCP to protect themselves from further disappointment or powerlessness.

Similarly, at the conception point of IICSA, staff were working to develop understanding into the experiences of VS. Numerous survivors and organisations developed channels of communication with government to inform and advise about the historic and ongoing effects of CSA. However, IICSA was another organisation, and some experienced the institution as untrustworthy. Thus, to defend against the fear of unreliability and future betrayal, trust was denied, and instead they sought to protect themselves from further

disappointment. In this way, IICSA staff experienced early erosions in trust in their interactions with a VS unrelated to IICSA, which had implications for the whole VS community. As one senior leader commented:

It put me in an incredibly difficult position with the Home Secretary because I've been saying to her and advisers we need to start engaging in groups. We need to start trusting them and then suddenly it's well, how can you trust them if they're recording?

This comment referred to the leaks of confidential meetings prior to the commencement of IICSA, which resulted in a reciprocated starting point of suspicion towards all VS.

From the outset, IICSA was a challenging environment for the VSCP to operate in. They experienced collective mistrust of other VS, including other panel members, despite those appointed not being involved in undermining the rules of engagement. One member described the sense of control imposed to manage the organisational anxiety, including monitoring and separation of the panel, as negatively affecting the perception of trustworthiness for other departments within The Inquiry:

I think the initial reaction to us, to shut us away in a room on our own... was a big barrier. Because we were then seen as something other than to the rest of The Inquiry... We were this random, dangerous group of survivors who... might be upset when you go to talk to them, or they might get angry.

Staff agreed that The Inquiry responded by engaging with the VSCP in a controlled environment. One senior leader noted that: "there would be some discussion about do we trust them? Do they really mean it?" Thus, a reciprocal lack of trust was a key obstacle that both IICSA staff and the VSCP had to overcome.

Barriers to developing trust were numerous and difficult in the formative years of the Inquiry. Consideration or engagement around role development by IICSA prior to the VSCP

appointment was limited. This developed over time, creating coherence and stability, which was welcomed by members. However, periods of instability, and unilateral decisions taken by IICSA, undermined the consistency needed for the panel:

We'd all just come to a consensus, The Inquiry and the VSCP, on how things were going to work. And then all of a sudden it was just... the carpet was literally just pulled. And it was like...that It's almost like they didn't want us to settle into anything they wanted this constant shifting floor.

Limited communication and a closed working practice, which included no structured induction for new VSCP members, conflicted with the panel's desire for open and transparent dialogue, with one member questioning: "how can you induct two people into a group without consulting the group?" Consequently, this deflated the trust and stability being built between staff and VSCP, as it re-enacted earlier experiences of actions and decisions taken without consultation between recruiting staff and existing members: "There was no thought about how it was going to impact us as a group" [VSCP member]. Such unexpected changes to group dynamics created heightened anxieties and hypervigilance to additional disruptions, which intensified the disempowerment felt at times.

Ruptures between the panel and IICSA staff were felt bilaterally. A breakdown in trust was most palpable for IICSA staff following the consecutive departures of two male VSCP members under controversial circumstances, including leaking excerpts of a key report documenting The Inquiry's progress. It re-opened old wounds that had been healing, and created a fresh, deeper disappointment. One senior IICSA staff recalled this incident as impacting the labile bonds that were forming, noting it was: "a breaking of the, sort of the concord that we'd built up about how we react." This event was observed as compounding the already fragile dynamic and cautious environment at IICSA, as another staff member described: "it was that rupture on the betrayal of trust, really, by a panel member that amplified this, this already existing problem." The experience also created a questioning of

the functioning capabilities of the panel for members of staff, as another IICSA staff member stated: “it was also felt by some that the VSCP was becoming a liability.” On the other hand, the panel members felt a betrayal two-fold, with many members expressing disappointment and hurt from the actions of a fellow panel member, and the repercussions to the reputation of the group.

Furthermore, new male members who joined the panel depicted the internal harm this had done. The panel experienced greater unease and uncertainty about their position and whether they would be able to trust new members. Thus, this was characterised as an additional hurdle to cultivating trusting collegiate relationships, especially within the VSCP. One new male member keenly felt the group’s vigilance: “it really hit that we would both have a mammoth job to do because the trust had been... it had been destroyed.” This also had long-term implications for all members, who felt they were still seen as untrustworthy many years later as the Inquiry was concluding. One member reflected on feeling alienated from their consultancy role at the latter stages of the report’s development: “it was a very, very strange feeling. As though we were a risk to the final report, and maybe not to be trusted with the contents.” The long-term consequences therefore had a disheartening and punitive effect on the remaining and new members who felt their lived experienced role was no longer respected.

There were also challenging consequences associated with the culture of hierarchical and disparate working patterns by certain departments at The Inquiry. The omitting nature of rigid governmental structures was highlighted as a focal barrier for individuals such as the VSCP, who were brought in for their personal and professional expertise. Some characterised the significance of these omissions as an unconscious parallel process: “we were never seen as equal partners. We were always sub-partners in their eyes.” Staff working closely with the VSCP could identify the consequences of treating the VSCP as passive recipients, and not being considered as active and equal partners: “the VSCP felt

disengaged from that process... you know, it was like a kind of 'why bother'." This disempowered position panel members were placed in was able to be contextualised over time, as one that was rooted in defending against the fear of the unknown, shutting down avenues for curiosity and cooperation:

I was very angry at them for not thinking it through and not doing better [at the start]. But I don't feel that anymore, because they were told to set up an inquiry about something they didn't know. Because if they knew there wouldn't be The Inquiry. And they had no idea what they were doing... But they didn't involve us in saying 'where to we start?' They wanted to appear like they had the answers, and that's what was hurtful. [VSCP member]

Thus, the role of reciprocity was determined as integral in maintaining and enhancing cooperative engagement, and the lack of curiosity reduced the chances of creating stronger emotional bonds between individuals in the VSCP and departments, which in turn would have enhanced mutual trustworthiness.

Although there were barriers across some areas of IICSA, VSCP members reported strong alliances with departments that valued mutuality and collaboration. The research team, and safeguarding and support, were identified as collegiate and collaborative: "I always felt that it was, there was genuine dialogue and a genuine exchange ... it felt really positive." VSCP members attributed this to their previous experiences working alongside trauma VS. This, alongside favouring participatory approaches encouraged iterative working partnerships to develop: "we were always aware of what they were doing, and we had the, the time to comment... we were involved in a meaningful way." The cross-system partnership working increased over time and across departments, who sought out the panel meaningfully, "what changed... other departments started doing afterwards, was they would have an idea to do something, so they'd come to talk to the VSCP." This mode of working

was appreciated, and others echoed the expansion of a collaborative dynamic: “I felt that changed over the years where we were more involved with things from the concept” [VSCP member].

Consequently, the expansion of reciprocity at IICSA built mutual value and increased esteem for panel members. Moreover, multi-disciplinary working for panel members helped some members realise that the organisational culture affected all areas, and reduced the feeling of separateness. One member positively recalled their involvement in workstreams on invisible barriers at The Inquiry:

I'm so glad I did that. ... I realised... It's not just an issue for the VSCP, it's an issue within IICSA as a whole, and it put me a little bit to rest, and it integrated me, I think, a lot more with staff.

This was echoed equally for IICSA staff members, with one describing the importance of working in partnership:

It felt quite critical... whenever there were pieces of work, you know, that I was...talking to SMT [senior management team] about, in relation to that, it felt it was vital that, you know, that it had been done in some way collaboratively with the VSCP.

The collaborative approach was hailed by other staff members who noted the quality of work increased when the lens widened beyond one perspective: “it felt like it was bringing more when we were all collaborating together, when it wasn't in sort of silos... it felt like it was a much, much better piece of work.” This integrative approach was therefore effective for both staff working in IICSA departments, and for the VSCP who increasingly felt meaningfully involved.

Stability, between the VSCP and in their dynamic with IICSA staff, was another key factor that improved trusting relationships over time. This fostered multi-disciplinary team

collaboration whereby both staff and VSCP members had predictability to their working arrangements, reducing anxieties, and relationships developed between the VSCP and departments progressively. A senior staff member celebrated the progression between IICSA staff and the VSCP: “once we got over the trust issues, we really engaged.” Panel members also described the importance of trauma-informed ethos in practice with them, and when this was fostered, relationships flourished: “you've got to be open, honest, and transparent, and that's how you work with us. That's how you get the best out of us.” This was notable in their work, whereby their expertise in trauma-informed processes for victims and survivors were used, such as the development and strengthening of the Truth Project processes, and across research and policy departmental work. There was a widespread view that the increase in trust and respect was essential to engendering better quality services that would support victims and survivors:

Once that trust was built, we could, we could disagree quite happily. And and so, you know, I'd, I'd come along and say, well, this is why we can't do this, this why we can't do that. And it got to the point where we said we don't like it, but we trust [the VSCP] enough to understand what we can't do.

As a result, this encouraged better working relations, built on mutual appreciation of expertise. Subsequently, stability and reciprocity were identified as key facilitators from both staff and VSCP members as an approach that cultivated deeper understanding, increased trust, and better output at The Inquiry.

4.5. Responding to the Unbearable – A Collective Trauma

4.5.1 *The Effects of a Traumatised Organisation*

Collective trauma can be characterised as the response to a shared traumatic experience (Hirshberger, 2018) It can have long-lasting effects, not just for the people directly impacted by the trauma, but for communities in the years and decades following (Li

et al., 2023). For survivors consulting to The Inquiry, this could be a challenging environment to work in. The physiological effects of trauma are vast, especially for VS of CSA, whose biological responses to repeated threats and danger are amplified and somatised (Wilson, 2009). During their appointment at The Inquiry, VSCP members shared a common experience of the weight of pressure, responsibility, and hostility from both other VS and the organisation, and the impact this had upon their physical and psychological health. All members described the negative consequences of working in this environment had on their physical health, recounting autoimmune responses flaring up, or having serious health conditions requiring surgical and systemic treatment. This resonated with panel experiences, as one VSCP member recalled the sacrifices of contributing in this way as a consultant-survivor, and the emotional toll it took:

I wasn't a survivor in my everyday life, I was turning up as a survivor. ... And every time we turned up we, we got triggered. We got traumatised. As a group, and as individuals. It was a really weird feeling... I would come home, and I would just need to decompress.

The periods of declining physical and psychological health symbolised for many members a: “physical demonstration of the impact of stress and pressure” [VSCP member] that were profoundly felt when cross-system tensions were heightened at IICSA. However, for some members of the VSCP, disclosing poor health was associated with fear of undermining their professional credibility: “I felt we shouldn't talk about bad health, because it just made us look like a victim.... I didn't really want to let them know, in case they used it somehow.” This was expanded on by another member who felt a burden of responsibility to The Inquiry. This was to the detriment of their recovery from major surgery, and compounded by working in a trauma-laden environment:

I felt like I couldn't take any time out... I felt like I wouldn't be looked upon favourably... So that obviously made everything worse for my healing because I just couldn't heal properly because I was dealing with trauma all the time.

The cognitive effects for VS of trauma can be substantial and activated without warning by stressful or triggering circumstances. This can lead to fluctuating difficulties with attention, executive functioning, and slower information processing (Halligan et al., 2003). Due to the tight work turnaround that often occurred at The Inquiry, this was not always adjusted for or thought about by staff, when asking VSCP to consult or review material. This was particularly notable when reviewing key documents, such as the final report, which was given to the panel in time limited conditions:

Because we've got those survivor experiences ... you want to make sure that it's right and you want to [provide] feedback, and you're reading stuff, and you're being triggered, your brain can't process things properly... I felt like that time pressure, and the fact that the brain science is what it is, I felt that it wasn't fair for us to [have to give] our feedback on something that was so important in such a short space of time.

This was marginalising for VSCP members who felt the effects of their trauma or disabilities were not recognised and left them feeling devalued by not being meaningfully involved. Reflecting on such incidents left some questioning their worth at IICSA: “you question whether your involvement is genuine ... There were times where I felt maybe our involvement was just tokenistic. And that's no good... that's not good for someone who, who, who has trauma to deal with.”

The context of The Inquiry meant that daily interactions for every department at IICSA were focused around investigating and uncovering the truth about institutional CSA. This also had a negative impact on staff, many of whom were not used to directly reading and hearing about the painful experiences of VS. Measures to protect staff wellbeing were advocated for by VSCP, members who expressed concern, noticing the vicarious traumatising effects it was having. This was also echoed by one staff member, who acknowledged that: “the staff group were quite saturated with trauma... secondary trauma.” Subsequently, structures were put in place to support members of staff at IICSA who were

affected. This was also embedded for VSCP members, who during challenging experiences had psychological support offered. This was welcomed and viewed as necessary for integration back into the working routine.

A central tenet of the experiences of responding to the terror associated with CSA, was to attempt to relieve the anxiety experienced at an organisational level. A staff member articulated this distress as:

I think you could very quickly feel that sense of trauma in the, in the system that wasn't being processed or worked through and was just... buzzing around. I think it was quite easy then to see that it wasn't the VSCP doing anything, it was what was happening across the system... day-in-day-out hearing people's experiences of child sexual abuse.

The lack of space to process or contextualise the secondary trauma staff were experiencing had consequences for the VSCP. VS who worked internally with some staff at The Inquiry were unconsciously viewed as a reminder of the distress and trauma, as one staff member interpreted: "I can imagine, for many people in The Inquiry that the VSCP, you know, represents the intolerable, if that makes sense, because [they] are all survivors".

A common response shared by trauma VS to manage distress, is to avoid events and experiences associated with reactivation of trauma memories. This was observed as a key response to the vicarious trauma experience by many IICSA staff, considering the horrors they were listening to and investigating: "I felt like their defence really was about avoidance when it came to the VSCP" [IICSA Staff member]. This was understood as a structural barrier which perpetuated obstacles to collaborative work between teams. Other staff members characterised it as:

Not that people didn't want to engage and do meaningful work with the VSCP and vice versa. But just because there wasn't enough mechanisms in the system to support staff to

process the work that they were doing, so that they were in a... healthier place, better mindset to be less defended, and more engaged with [the VSCP].

The VSCP acknowledged the defences of some staff towards them; however, this was viewed differently by VSCP members. Others saw staff responses as projection of terror, with a member sharing: “we were holding all the pain and anger of the staff. That's how it felt. Once they realised how serious uh and prevalent sexual abuse was, they were horrified. Where did they, where could they go with that?” Therefore, the permeation of trauma in the organisation and its effects was an ongoing experience that both IICSA staff and VSCP members had to contend.

4.5.2 *Parallel Processes arising at The Inquiry*

Parallel processes is a psychoanalytic term, which describes a phenomenon whereby a therapist can unconsciously recreate a salient experience or difficulty faced by a client (Bloom & Farragher, 2010). In circumstances surrounding The Inquiry, all members agreed that processes of power and authority were pertinent in the interactions between The Inquiry and VSCP, and at times each unconsciously viewing experiences as that parallel to abuse dynamics. One panel member articulated the dual responses to hostility and fear that had an impact on the relationship between the panel and the rest of The Inquiry:

I think in lots of ways, we as a group treated The Inquiry as a perpetrator. You know, they would constantly be doing things to us that we didn't want them to do, but we didn't know how to get away from them. And I think that The Inquiry saw us in some ways as perpetrators. And I kind of think that set something up.

Members acknowledged the anxiety present in staff and shared their understanding of why various Inquiry staff feared survivor responses: “Most people who live through traumatic things, they have to get angry before their voices get heard.” This process of expressing

anger was misunderstood and feared by staff, as the panel member explained, “It doesn’t mean that that anger comes with the person who’s in the room with you or that you can’t manage it.

The fear of engaging with the emotional tenor of a consultative-survivor panel had implications for how staff interpreted VSCP attempts to collaborate. As such, it was hard for staff to empathise with the experiences of the VSCP, and instead anxiety was, at times, projected onto the VSCP: “There was a real sense in IICSA that [the] VSCP couldn’t be managed, and my experience of the ways in which people tried to manage the VSCP was that they tried to get some form of...malleable compliance” [VSCP member]. This experience was also articulated by another, who described the Inquiry’s attempts to pacify the panel as a painful reminder, and a parallel to that of their childhood experiences of sexual abuse:

I found that I ended up falling back into the old practice of being compliant. And so they brought my compliance and that really rested badly with me because In the years of being abused, I became utterly compliant... And that is just absolutely awful...because it certainly plays into the years of trauma I suffered and still suffer.

The VSCP at various points experienced their interactions with processes and people at the Inquiry as unconsciously re-enacting situations victims and survivors face during their experiences of CSA. A panel member characterised the parallel processes between abuse disclosures and the experiences of The Inquiry:

[W]orking with the Inquiry was like working in a mirror of abuse... All those bad reactions to disclosure...So there we are, in The Inquiry, trying to raise what we knew was our truth, not about our own particular abuse, but about the way The Inquiry was actually working. And it was the same mirrored response: Be quiet, go away, it doesn't matter, we'll deal with it later... It was the same mirror of silencing and shutting down. It felt like another form of abuse.

Staff were unaware of the implications of their avoidance and projection at times. However, these interactions were exasperating for the VSCP, who were acutely aware of the unconscious dynamics and responded by becoming more vocal to raise awareness of the harm occurring: “then we started doing our side of that by attacking. Not in an attack sort of way, but in the way that we would do as survivors, in trying to get... in a position where we were heard” [VSCP Member].

Other panel members resonated with the imitation of abusive processes. Another member depicted their experiences of questioning decisions or work output as having a silencing and castigatory effect: “I found that that when we challenged, it was almost like we were being punished, and therefore things went a bit quiet, or you weren't contacted to do something.” The castigation was a familiar experience for many panel members who noticed that this resulted in a recurring pattern of frustration and avoidance between the panel and IICSA. Such parallels between the VSCP and IICSA reoccurred at different points throughout the Inquiry, as one member articulated: “these dynamics of power were very live.” Whilst many of the processes and actions at IICSA were unintentional, the significance for the panel was substantial.

4.6. Life After IICSA: The legacy of the Consultant-Survivors

The final theme that emerged from the interviews and focus groups was centred around the transition out from The Inquiry for members of the VSCP. This was characterised by two distinctive subthemes surrounding The Inquiry’s conclusion and which aspects of their role have continued beyond. The second subtheme that emerged was distinctive to reflecting on the learnings and imprints left from their role as a consultant-survivor.

4.6.1. Conclusions and New Iterations

Endings and integration are a vital stage of any work. They are of particular importance to honour the work together, the change, and ending of a relationship in psychological and survivor settings. This was especially important for VSCP members, many of whom work in or have experience in therapeutic settings. Thus, it was important for the VSCP that The Inquiry imbued the principles of trauma-informed care to endings in the organisation, to celebrate the valued work, and avoid sudden conclusions and activating unwanted feelings of rejection.

The end of The Inquiry was experienced as a conflicting time for the VSCP. As the conclusion of the Inquiry drew closer, members described an absence of symbolic processes and events acknowledging their contributions as a panel. This was difficult for the VSCP, who had experienced barriers to recognition throughout their appointment, and repeated occurrences of feeling devalued. Yet, on the other hand, individually, members felt considered by the organisation. Several VSCP members also shared the importance of being supported by The Inquiry to think about life after IICSA. As The Inquiry drew closer to its conclusion, funding was approved and organised to assist panel members in their transition to a new stage, after IICSA. This transitional process included authorisation for training programmes and employment specialists, which were welcomed and appreciated, as one member described: "They've given me the opportunities that I wouldn't have had a home." Similarly, gratitude was shared about the employment positions obtained due to working on the panel. Another panel member shared the significance of the training IICSA funded as reconnecting them to their identity: "The Inquiry paying for that really gave me back who I was to a point that I... I didn't realise who I'd lost as a result. So there are those moments that I'm very grateful for."

Contrasting feelings of gratitude and marginalisation were a continued theme occurring at key events. Notably, being asked to read a substantive document, the final report draft, in time-limited conditions was an example of feeling both thankful and alienated, especially for members of the panel with disabilities that required reasonable adjustments.

Despite this experience, the panel recognised that many of the barriers they faced with staff at the Inquiry were inadvertent, and a product of the work structures. Panel members also acknowledged that staff motivation towards transformation for VS was sincere. Likewise, the value of the VSCP was reiterated by key staff at The Inquiry, looking to future iterations of a survivor-consultative panel: “If I had to advise the Secretary on how to set up an Inquiry, making sure you've got a VSCP, this is how I would do it.”

The conclusion of IICSA marked divergent experiences for civil service staff and VSCP members. The dedication to the cause of justice for VS continued to a new phase for the VSCP, whereas for civil service staff members, it was the end of a working chapter, and redeployment to another project, as one member articulated: “A huge difference I felt in the VSCP and our understanding of what The Inquiry meant... for most people... it was a fixed point in their lives... Whereas we live it, don't we.” This was pertinent for members of the VSCP who felt they were left solely responsible, and the only visible face of the final report for VS to share their concerns with following its publication.

Similarly, a sense of responsibility was felt in other areas following IICSA's conclusion. Gaps were identified in how to ensure accountability after the report's release:

There's a legal and structural fault in the whole system... what is the point of all of that effort and work, when at the end there is uncertainty around whether things will be adopted? There is no process in place to monitor whether the recommendations would be implemented, if they have been impactful.

Thus, lobbying for the implementation of The Inquiry's recommendations to the government was a new iteration of their mission for justice, as one VSCP member stated: “it's not the end for me. The work doesn't end now. It starts.” This new beginning resonated with other members, who shared the next stage of life post-IICSA for the panel: “IICSA might be finished, but we haven't finished. We're now dealing with the stuff that IICSA put in place.” Moreover, dedication to justice has intensified for VSCP members, considering the reaction from

policymakers: “the government response is luke-warm. But, but, you know... we keep on hammering away at that.” This for members has resulted in an unpaid continuation of the work beyond IICSA, “Last week I did over 7-8 hours for work for IICSA unpaid...it's about making sure the work we inputted and all of the voices of survivors that we heard from, that is really important and that's why we are carrying on the work.” Consequently, life post-IICSA has shifted to a new phase of holding government departments to account.

4.6.2. Legacy and Learnings

Being a consultant-survivor was a confronting and rewarding experience for VSCP members, as it was for staff who worked closely with them. The appointment resulted in many learnings for panel members, particularly in relation to the value of their contributions, their influence, and the skilled space developed from having a lived experience consultative panel. Some members described their appointment as providing a sense of emotional and financial worth that they had not previously experienced:

People shouldn't underestimate the importance of that, because as a survivor, you've pretty much written yourself off emotionally in self-worth and confidence-wise just because of the nature of your abuse and what's happened to you.

This resonated with other members. For some, being a consultant-survivor increased their confidence and facilitated an environment for them to share their expertise: “It gave me a voice in a way that I wasn't really wasn't allowed [previously]” [VSCP Member]. The appointment also expanded members' skillsets, with one member describing the experience as increasing their knowledge at operating across different environments to influence policy:

I've learned... more diverse skills you could ever learn in any other job. And that was not intended. But that's, that's still been a positive.... We learned how to lobby, how to write papers, how and when to shut up, and when to speak out.

These experiences were indicative of the varied personal and professional growth that developed from through the VSCP's time at IICSA. It also highlights the skillset that lived experience panels may require or gain, when sharing their expertise in major investigations on social issues, such as a public inquiry.

Alongside this, building lasting and respectful relationships was a crucial outcome. A diverse and united collective was a challenge, but one that resulted in mutual regard and strong rapport, as a member reflected:

One of the biggest things I take away is, is just how much respect I have for the other VSCP members. Uh I value their experience and their personal responses to what they've been through... So that closeness in in working is something that I really value... it's also taught me that the different pathways that people take, and what they bring to that, in terms of the experiences as children, and how it enriches what they do now.

The significance of the bond between members was described by all as a cherished gain from their IICSA appointment: "those relationships became very important to me. ... I admire those people, them all, and what they did, and what we all did together" [VSCP member].

The strength of their bond was also described as being useful in garnering influence as a collective post-IICSA. One key legacy panel that members identified is their strength as a panel to lobby for change, in the present and future:

Our determination to carry forward and to move forward with the recommendations, either collectively or individually, I think, is our legacy as a VSCP. There are those of us who um, will continue to work that we do in a quiet, gentle, sensitive way, or there'll [be] some of us that will be going out with bangs and drums and all of that, and chanting as loud as we can. And I think that, I suppose, the VSCP the legacy is the strength that we had as a collective.

The title and consultant-survivor status inside The Inquiry continues to hold prestige and sway as a group beyond IICSA. As one member described: "collectively, with the VSCP

brand, we still have influence, whereas individually we have less influence. And so, it is the sum of all our parts that actually makes people sit up and listen.” This has therefore been reiterated by members as a lasting legacy, and an essential strategy to continue in their determination to mobilise and campaign for justice.

Having a consultant-survivor panel also decreased the taboo of talking about CSA. This change in culture that was facilitated by the panel benefitted The Inquiry, enabling them to have more open discussions, and gain awareness around CSA and its effects. One panel member explained that the VSCP’s involvement was essential for staff to understand the vast effects of CSA:

As a group, I think we were able to share all our expertise and knowledge with staff members who probably didn't understand. [Senior staff] were saying in the beginning ‘I had no clue what child sexual abuse was like in the beginning until we got talking to you.’

The awareness created a space for dialogue and curiosity between VS and civil servants. This was paramount, and characterised by some panel members, who described the hope that their involvement and The Inquiry continue to have a positive effect in breaking down barriers in the future around CSA:

I want [there] to be a cultural shift and change in the language use when it comes to talking about child sexual abuse. I want people to openly talk about it... I have seen that change. Not dramatically, but... people are more willing to talk about child sexual abuse. [VSCP member]

The desire that increased awareness and open dialogue will encourage accountability resonated. All members shared the personal significance of being advocacy-focused as a collective, to assist in their long-term aim of acknowledgment for VS. One member recalled the importance using their voice in senior political spaces, to convey the following message: “all survivors want, literally all survivors want is accountability at the end of the day, that's all they want.” Therefore, the mission of being a conduit for survivors at The Inquiry was

essential, as another member shared their legacy hope: “that survivors’ experiences, that are expressed all throughout the final report, begin to be understood by those in power who have a responsibility to change people’s lives for the better. That’s my hope.” Consequently, this experience gave some members renewed hope for justice in the future, as “IICSA will enable that process to move a bit quicker, because it’s not just me saying it... there’s an organisation saying it. So that’s where I hope it shifts.” [VSCP Member]

Being the first consultant-survivor panel in a child abuse inquiry was considered as an important learning experience, with hope that it will encourage reflections from government in the future about how the process can be made easier for VS and staff working together:

[If] part of that legacy can be how other inquiries can work in a more effective way, then that would be amazing... it would be brilliant to think that other survivor panels could come together in... an easier way, in a more structured way, and supported way. [VSCP Member]

Learning from the challenges faced was determined as essential by many members. This was especially important with regards to clarity and consistency of role, expectations, and structure of communication between the main Inquiry chair and panel, and VS consulting to The Inquiry. Creating space for open dialogue was therefore viewed as a key learning point for future inquiries to integrate lived experience participation.

Integrating a consultant-survivor panel had a lasting impact on both VSCP and staff. Consulting with IICSA had been enriching, with numerous positive experiences shared by several members. Other members spoke of pride in opening the door for future consultative-survivor panels: “I’m really proud because... I think we were one of the pioneers in having a VSCP as part of an inquiry that, you know, hadn’t been done anywhere”. Staff members also shared positive experiences of working alongside the panel. One staff member described the VSCP as a: “remarkable group of people who had a lot to offer” to IICSA, which was echoed widely across staff. It was particularly resonant when reflecting on future Inquiries, as one

senior staff member believed that panels such as the VSCP should be essential, stating “Why would you run an inquiry into anything without involving the people in it?” Therefore, having a consultant-survivor panel at IICSA has enabled staff’s viewpoints to transcend a perspective beyond government processes, and more reflective of the communities it is investigating.

5. Discussion

5.1. Review of the Findings

This participatory action research aimed to document and illuminate the VSCP's way of 'being in the world' (Jackson, 2009) in the context of a public inquiry. Through a series of co-facilitated focus groups with the VSCP, and individual interviews with past and present panel members and IICSA staff, the findings revealed the panel brought a nuanced and rich contribution to the existing social structures of an inquiry. The addition of VS habitus and epistemology, meant that The Inquiry was aiming to operate in a three-dimensional ontology, as the VS worldview and praxis did not easily align with existing legalistic and civil service administration. VS perspectives both challenged and enhanced, the 2D lens of expediency, regulation, neutrality, and protocols. In turn, the VSCP in many ways became a type of connective tissue to the siloed bones and organs functioning within the organism of the Inquiry. The panel provided a relational and protective barrier as a function of their role, both facilitating and shielding between external VS, advocacy groups, the mass media, and the Inquiry's workstreams and processes. But as with connective organs, like skin and tendons, they can be subject to damage, and thus ruptures and dislocations can occur, separating out from other structures in the organism. Such dislocations from departments and workstreams led to a felt sense of alienation and at times could overshadow or divert from the importance of the relational and protective barrier of the VSCP. The VSCP's epistemology contributed to the Inquiry's consideration of the role of emotions and communication in justice mechanisms. This was evident both 'inside', interpersonally between The Inquiry and VSCP, but also 'outside' of the organisation, enriching the understanding of emotional experience of VS engaging with or expressing concerns about The Inquiry. Epistemologically, the panel brought a new means of communication to The Inquiry, and a type of knowledge production that had not previously been garnered in other inquiry settings. Thus, their contribution, as

the first advisory and consultative panel for VS in a non-recent child abuse inquiry was profound.

This research underlines the importance of survivor epistemology within an inquiry. VSCP members identified trustworthiness, integrity, reciprocity, and emotional attunement to processes and interactions at The Inquiry as both crucial and a valued part of VS sense of identity and practice. The role of emotions in public inquiries continues to be of salient importance. Both interpersonally, and within The Inquiry's culture, the VSCP described barriers in attempts at incorporating emotions within the conversations, processes, and structures of IICSA. This corresponds with existing research depicting the struggle for justice mechanisms such as public inquiries to feature and embrace emotion as a way of communicating and acknowledging the experiences of VS (Doak & Taylor, 2013; Gallen, 2023; Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019; Wright, 2020).

Panel members spoke about expressions of 'passion' and emotional resonance or responses as core to the VS experience, and as a central means of communication. Several panel members held their advocacy or activist backgrounds as core to their identity; and viewed emotional expression as key to communicating messages or mobilising action among individuals and organisations. The use of power and emotions in this context adds to emerging research around VS activism and mobilisation associated with public inquiries (Gallen, 2023; Wright & Henry, 2019; Wright, Henry & Moran, 2022). The activist panel members described great difficulty in limiting aspects of themselves when navigating communicative dynamics at the inquiry.

The VSCP described The Inquiry culture as controlled, clinical and formal. Passion has been demonstrated as a useful tool for action for many VS (Stein, 2011; Whittier, 2012), and thus, a culture promoting objectivity and dampening how the VSCP could express themselves, was a notable challenge. This poses the question of how VS panels and inquiries can work to integrate personal identity and emotional expression into the culture of

a justice-led organisation. Core aspects of a survivor advocacy is to embrace, communicate, and channel compassion and care. The benefits of integrating this approach alongside Civil Service culture, was exemplified by the experiences VSCP members shared of the successful co-development of Truth Project, collaborative research processes, and across workstreams. Therefore, it feels important for inquiry infrastructure to facilitate processes which offer space to engage with emotional expression. This may include incorporating future VSCP's communication of ideas such as their attunement to the emotional experience of VS, and removing limits to how this knowledge is conveyed. Similar considerations and adaptations have been documented in other public bodies where VS and organisations have embedded lived-experience consultancy into their structures (Poverty Alliance, 2020). These findings demonstrate the iterative tension between the importance of therapeutic politics for VS when communicating and challenging the state (Whittier, 2012), and the need for justice processes to be bound by fairness and impartial processes (Gardiner, 2019). Moreover, Dolezal's (2015) encouragement of a shame-sensitive service, for a culture to fully adopt a trauma-informed approach means that attunement to emotions is unavoidable when working with VS. It appears that whilst careful consideration was given to the trauma-informed approach to VS across both the Forum and Truth Project settings (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b), equal consideration to VS across all inquiry settings and roles is required.

The place of emotion, justice, and advocacy continues to be an existing, and perhaps at its foundation, a longstanding philosophical, tension between the legal and survivor epistemologies. Advocacy is a key feature of both cultures. Advocacy for both is aligned in the sense that is largely justice oriented in its motivations. However, the process and priorities of advocacy differs greatly between the two worldviews. Legal professionals may subscribe to view that prioritises reason, and as Justice Holmes Jr, states, "emotion is an unreliable guide to a true decision on fact, and that there is something suspect in evoking or displaying emotion" (Shepherd & Cherrick, 2006, p153). The application of 'reason' and

establishment of 'facts' is thus positioned and appraised in contrast to emotion. The perspective that to deliver justice via advocacy requires removing emotion from argument, is at odds with the survivor-advocacy epistemology, which is borne from personal transformation, working through individual pain, and transcending to the therapeutic politics of a "strong oppositional collective identity" (Whittier, 2009, p169). It garners its strength from the ability to use emotion as a powerful tool to express and highlight the political and social failings associated with CSA, with justice for VS and future prevention of CSA key advocacy priorities (Lundy, 2020; Stein, 2011).

Thus, these competing modes of being in IICSA clashed. The legal worldview underpinned the scope, direction, and regulations for The Inquiry. Considering the power relations that Gallen (2023) refers to in transitional justice measures, legalistic forms of knowledge production held the social, cultural, and political capital within the field of The Inquiry, indeed were embedded in its very foundation. Prioritising 'reason' and the suspicion towards emotion curtailed the VSCP's mechanism of mobilising action and communicating their position across The Inquiry. If, as a foundation, legalistic structures are favoured, it leaves the question of how advisory and consultative panels can meaningfully share their expertise.

The organisational culture, both shaped by justice-legal regulations and civil service administration, was highlighted by both members of the VSCP and by inquiry staff as an influential facilitator and barrier to the VSCP's experiences of expression and communication within the organisation. As staff revealed, expressing emotions was implicitly and explicitly contraindicative to the culture of inquiry governance. The civil service code of conduct explicitly stipulates that 'neutrality' is an expectation of its staff, and implicitly in its encouragement of objective, non-affective communication between members and departments. Staff description of 'deadpan' communication as a feature of interactions within The Inquiry, infers that detachment and impassiveness, was a hegemonic means of communicating and delivering messages within the organisation. By the very nature of IICSA, it appears to be a paradoxical task for staff to be expected to promote expressionless

communication within an organisation without recognition of its emotional salience. Additionally, in its culture of neutrality in communication, unintended consequences include avoidance, which may arise to defend against the difficult task of managing perceptions of credibility when confronting the difficult reality of CSA. Yet, IICSA did take steps to adopt VS participatory-centred aspects into the investigative processes, which has been lacking in some other inquiries (Lundy, 2020; McAlinden, 2013; Pembroke, 2019). However, there appears to be, in part, a continuation of a state response and justice paradigm which offers limited space to recognise the role of emotions in communication with VS, between staff, and in its approach to responding to VS and citizens in the public sphere (Doak & Taylor, 2013; Gallen, 2023; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Wright, 2020).

In some therapeutic circumstances, the role of neutrality, a non-judgemental affective state, can be understood as empowering, and a useful position to hold in allowing the individual to explore their own internal or external dilemmas without external influence (Gelso & Kanninen, 2017). However, in order for neutrality to be welcomed, as described in such therapeutic settings, an empathic environment and infrastructure, one which fosters safety must be established first. An empathic environment was experienced by the VSCP when working alongside allied departments such as in research. This indicates that neutrality in this context could be received and welcomed by members when it is accompanied by reciprocity and an implicit respect and mutuality.

However, messages given to the panel by staff encouraging the removal of salience in communication with departmental staff for messages to be treated with seriousness, suggest a negative correlation between credibility and emotion. This dynamic perpetuated power imbalances pertaining to communication at IICSA, and underscored the difficulty for testimonial credibility, and an epistemic injustice that the VSCP experienced. It supports existing studies identifying the difficulties for VS, irrespective of participatory role, when giving voice, and communicating their perspectives and expectations (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; McAlinden, 2013; Pembroke, 2019). Moreover, staff's characterisation of

'professionalising' or 'civil-servicizing' the panel, was synonymous with increasing structure and curtailing the expression of emotions. Whilst structural change was received by the VSCP favourably, it highlighted the perception of emotions as a threat to the credibility of the organisation.

It underlines the epistemological-power relations that existed between The Inquiry and VSCP. The research findings draw attention to the ways in which the emotional habitus of VS were implicitly or explicitly suppressed, both in interactions with staff, and by the culture of the inquiry field. They also emphasise previous research which characterises the tensions with current structural and cultural formats that operate in public inquiries (Gallen, 2023). The removal of emotional expression was later conceded to be a mistake by a civil servant, acknowledging the importance of it as an aspect of the VSCP's identity, and by the nature of their subjective lived experiences. They suggested a 'midway' integrative approach was favourable to embrace both worldviews of emotionality and pragmatism. This could suggest that there are movements towards the flexibility required when incorporating VS centred approaches in public inquiries.

Comparing to other models of lived experience consultation within a historical abuse inquiry setting, the importance of activism was underlined by the role of a combined expertise advisory panel operating outside of HIAI, the Panel of Experts for Redress (Lundy, 2020). This panel comprised of VS as experts by lived experience, health professionals, and community human rights charity members. As a combined panel of expertise using their knowledge from both inside and outsider positions of the inquiry, they lobbied and put forward briefings containing suggestions for better treatment, redress options and compensation for VS of investigations conducted at HIAI. The research denoted the influence of VS as members of the panel of experts, and the influence of the combined panel at mobilising the inquiry and state into actionable change. There was perhaps flexibility in being a panel operating outside of the regulations of HIAI, in comparison to the VSCP's binding by internal inquiry rules and practices. Nevertheless, the triptych of epistemologies

which emerged from VSCP and staff at IICSA's reflections, complements Lundy's research on the role of VS activism. It depicts the need for integration of skills and strategies, like the artist's triptych, and the effectiveness in the worldviews working together to deliver steps towards transformative action.

Survivorship and public inquiries have highlighted the dynamic tension between individual participation and meaningful systemic response (Wright et al., 2018). As inquiries and other institutions are utilising VS perspectives as forms of expertise by experience, and in other forms of survivor activism (Wright, & Henry 2019), it is important that institutions and VS are clear about what their survivorship means in this context. The research findings highlight the complex dynamic of survivorship as an identity, and that of a collective VS consultative panel identity. It unearthed the desire for VSCP members to be seen not solely by their VS identity within The Inquiry, but beyond this as individuals with numerous skills and attributes, personally and professionally. Survivorship is a multifaceted experience, and as such, it intersects with different parts of one's identity. It seems important for public inquiries to be clear about expectations around survivorship and participation by consultation. For instance, are other aspects of the VS identity welcome as part of their expertise, such as that as professional training or aspects of their identity outside of being a 'VS'? Additionally, there should be clarity around disclosures required by inquiries in the context of consultative models of participation. Is there an expectation for VS consultants to carry the emotional burden of disclosing intimate details about their abuse history, sometimes repeatedly, in different public forums? Moreover, is this an open dynamic where inquiry staff can be more transparent and open in their approach about their own backgrounds? Navigating such questions, including considerations around the intersections between identity, agency, and emotion, in the dynamic between staff and consulting VS could be key. Transparency around roles and expectations in these contexts appears to be central to understanding lived experience participation. Clarifying these questions also has

the possibility to minimise potential re-traumatisation which can arise, such as in previous inquiries (Hamber & Lundy, 2020), and in this current context.

VS' habitus are intertwined with vital aspects of their sense of self. There is a desire to both treat others and be treated with dignity, as a person with individual subjective experiences, emotions, thoughts, and needs (Oveden, 2012). There is a need to engage in honest and open dialogues as an antidote to deceit and secrecy which permeated their personal experiences of abuse (Herman, 2023). Furthermore, there is a hope for community solidarity and public acknowledgment in the pursuit of justice and safety for themselves and others (Lundy, 2020; Whittier, 2012; Wright, 2020). In this research, the need for integrity and reliability were emphasised as fundamental, both as embodied traits for VS and the VSCP, and as an expectation interpersonally with staff and IICSA. Reliability and integrity are two characteristics that are essential in determining trustworthiness with another, particularly for VS (Alyce, 2023). Being reliable for VS engaging and communicating with The Inquiry was of utmost importance for the VSCP. A heightened sense of responsibility to be consistent in communication and actions with VS and treat their needs and concerns with seriousness was evident. Such an approach signifies attunement with VS' emotional and justice needs. Being transparent and consistent signifies that mechanisms of justice, such as public inquiries, can recognise emotional needs, and contribute on an interpersonal level and in the public sphere, to a sense of recognition and validation of the harm VS have experienced. (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Herman, 2023; Wright et al., 2018). This, however, was not always felt to be a reciprocal experience for VSCP members during interactions with staff and Inquiry structures. The description of a 'constant shifting floor' associated with the role and communications to the panel signifies a barrier to consistency. It poses the question of how can staff and structures foster conditions for stability and consistency within the panel? Perhaps conversations during the construction of the panel pertaining to the practical and emotional needs should be negotiated. Importantly, attention could be given to how staff

communicate this across an organisation which has lots of separate moving workstreams with their own sub-cultures and practices.

Across The Inquiry, there was an understanding that VS required transparency, and therefore having a consultant-survivor panel, as characterised by staff, was an important step in ensuring the Inquiry could be held to account both externally, and from within IICSA. The findings gave light to staff's implicit understanding of VSCP members as a panel of VS with characteristics of high integrity, and this was reported as an asset in keeping IICSA 'honest', ensuring that its core purpose was adhered to. The terms of reference, and the purpose of public inquiries, were focused on an uncovering of the 'truth' through investigations and VS hearing processes, to deliver public accountability, and make and raise awareness about the extent and impact of CSA (Wright, 2017). Transparency for VS is a large component to the experience of justice. As Herman (2023) describes the first act of resistance for VS is in the process of 'truth telling'. This was evident in the ways in which VSCP members described a favouring of clarity, with Inquiry staff, in their aims to be a channel of communication to external VS groups, and in their engagement with the public sphere via raising awareness and negotiating dialogue with the mass media. As such, communicating to dispel and breakdown opaque narratives was a core aspect of their experience at IICSA. In this context, it characterises the multifaceted meanings ascribed to honesty and transparency. It brings light to the ethics of survivorship, both in the embodiment of a trait of honesty for VS, and a shared aim of keeping someone or the Inquiry 'honest', inferring oversight and accountability. It depicts an infusion of the consultative panel with the wider agentic 'survivor mission', underlining the VSCP's position as a mediative space to communicate the broader needs of VS. Moving forward, therefore, it may be useful for inquiries to reflect on, if the aim is for VS consultative panels to hold the Inquiry processes and structures accountable, by honesty and transparency, how will their feedback be welcomed and integrated? Is this a bilateral experience whereby honesty and transparency is reciprocated, or will the limits to transparency be clearly defined?

The shifting positioning of individual-collective survivor identity was a contributing aspect to the uncertainty. The VSCP articulated awareness that The Inquiry, in their recruitment actions, noted the importance of representation and reach. After establishing the VSCP, it became clear that the cross-section of VS views, representations for varying institutions, and intersecting identities were sought out to understand a wide range of VS perspectives. VS perspectives, as noted, are not monolithic. Yet there was an expectation to provide a cohesive VS insight, which was a significant challenge for the VSCP, to reach consensus but also convey the nuance and variability of subjective experience. This pressure to offer a unifying voice as a panel also created expectations and tensions externally, as VS communities felt inevitably disappointed when their experience of abuse was not captured. Inquiries need to be clear about why they may need a sole perspective in those contexts for the panel, otherwise it could result in unwanted inter-group tensions, where consultant-survivors are required to compare and contrast their positions and interests, which invariably creates a dynamic which creates places VS in positions against one another, as was identified in this research at times. The need for transparency during decision-making processes has been identified as a key need for VS participation in public inquiries (Lundy, 2020; Pembroke, 2019). Without clarity, a 'pitting' of VS interests and experiences can become enacted. Consequently, this can recreate experiences of marginalisation in the inquiry context, where intersecting identities or aspects of the VS experience are not represented as part of CSA experiences.

VS, and other experts by lived experience roles, place the function of being a conduit as an important feature of the position (Pratt, 2021). It was an aspect of their appointment that was held in high regard by the VSCP and an area by which they felt individually and collectively they added a facilitative value to The Inquiry. VS experiences whilst participating at public inquiries has been variable (Barker et al., 2023a; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Moran & Salter, 2022; Pembroke, 2019). Therefore, a conduit is a vital aspect of having a VS panel and has been identified in other research in public health bodies as a key facilitator to

enhancing the experience of service users (Sandhu, 2017). Predominantly positive experiences in private hearing sessions, such as the Truth Project at IICSA, depicted the attention to creating an environment and conditions that foster psychological and emotional safety and demonstrating care to them (Barker et al., 2023a; Moran & Salter, 2022). There is a crucial need for an understanding of the emotional spectrum that surrounds engagement for VS, and these findings demonstrate the value of consultative panels in offering this platform and unique expertise. There was an explicit understanding by both the VSCP and The Inquiry, that IICSA represented another potentially harmful institution and thus, trustworthiness was to be earned. Thus, being positioned as a bridge to open communication and break down barriers to VS attending the Truth Project supports the need for roles of this kind in public inquiries. It contributes to existing literature denoting the value of the VSCP in their role as the experiential facilitator (Barker et al., 2023a), and underlines the importance of such roles (Sandhu, 2017). The role of a conduit draws parallels to the importance of private and public healing processes for VS, particularly the need for connection, belonging, advocacy, sharing of ideas, and integration with the multiple constituencies that the VSCP were engaged with within and outside The Inquiry. This aspect of the role could be seen as a connector between the healing processes and justice interests of VS (Daly, 2017). It also demonstrates the benefits and the need for adopting a trauma-informed culture within organisations. Barker et al.'s (2023a) findings underscore the importance of lived-experience panels, and the benefits for VS in their participatory experience. It also gives weight to VS advocacy group calls for greater collaboration and participatory-centred positions, such as the VSCP, being embedded within inquiry structures (Lundy, 2019; Pembroke, 2019).

The psychological contract was a substantial theme identified by conditions shaping the panel's appointment experience. The concept of a psychological contract is the shared process detailing implicit and explicit expectations of the role between an employer and employee. It sets out the opportunities and boundaries of the role, it can foster a sense of

containment and ease, among both employee and employer in the mutual understanding about the position (Caldwell & Peters, 2018; Conway & Briner, 2002). Additionally, this mutual understanding can be crucial during periods of change and uncertainty, and if relationships are not established early on, it can lead to a moral injury, where individuals feel they are working against their values or blamed for something that is not their responsibility (Anderson, 2021), compounding a sense of injustice. The VSCP was a public and paid appointment accompanied a contract of employment. As the findings depicted, this came with a psychological contract also, which for the VSCP could be characterised by the implicit and explicit expectations of reciprocity, trust in their abilities for which they've been employed, clear responsibilities, the ability to contribute to an enhanced understanding of CSA, increase engagement with VS, and add to the workstreams' development across The Inquiry. However, it was not clear what the implicit and explicit expectations were of the VSCP.

The expectations of the role, and the difference in being able to achieve these became central to the VSCP's appraisal of the early years of their panel. Primarily, members and staff identified the lack of clarity in relation to roles and responsibilities of a victim and survivor consultative panel. Whilst ambiguity initially may have been the product of well-intentioned actions, with early determinations by management for panel members to create their own terms of reference, little introduction to the legal and civil service environment may have created confusion in what the panel could achieve and its legal or practical limits within an inquiry setting. It highlighted the initial differences in interpretation between staff and the panel of how an inquiry could incorporate a new form of knowledge expertise, such as the VSCP. This, for members, translated to recalling feelings of devaluation, anxiety relating to job uncertainty, scoping for potential work opportunities, and creating their own workflow monitoring in the years of no infrastructure around the VSCP. The panel described the barriers they faced in interactions with departments, because of the lack of 'containable' or 'containing' sense of what the VSCP represented as part of the organisation, and the ways

in which they could offer input. Consequently, they were often avoided, which contributed to experiences where they felt they simply represented bureaucratic expediency, a 'tick box' exercise, as opposed to the VSCP's appointment being meaningful and integrated within the structures and processes of The Inquiry. Consulting panels, whether embedded in the structure of an inquiry, or as a function in consultation with VS groups during the initial stages of an inquiry's development, require transparency about the expectations and parameters of the role. This perhaps will avoid the sense of devaluation which was experienced at times by members of the VSCP, and as characterised by VS in the HIAI (Hamber & Lundy, 2020).

As with a new position, one may receive an induction into the structures, processes, and habits of a workplace. However, the absent induction into the civil service' habitus, protocols, and regulations, left the VSCP feeling both unsure of how to perform their roles, and further alienated within the organisation. For trauma VS, compounding experiences of marginalisation and alienation can lead to distress and the potential for re-traumatisation. It is also not conducive to a sense of dignity and attributed to worthiness (Herman, 2023). VS benefit from understanding what is expected of them (Stubley & Young, 2021). Perhaps in its efforts to empower the consultative panel to determine their own workflow and responsibilities, the lack of clarity about roles and functions of the panel compounded their palpable frustration and anxiety. Inquiry norms and practices, particularly those with statutory functions, are governed with rules and protocols, maintaining independence, and self-preservation (Gallen, 2023; McAlinden & Naylor, 2016). As such, the innovative opportunity to create their own terms of references, and the hopes of the reach and influence associated with this were marred by the legalistic restrictive positioning, due to concern with partiality and bias, and the threat of a judicial review. Thus, the 'constant shifting floor' of the panel perhaps also perpetuated the lack of containable identity of the panel for staff, and instead created an unknown, threatening sub-altern force that the VSCP represented in the minds of departments within The Inquiry. Considering this, it could be helpful for inquiries to co-

produce with VS the scope and responsibilities of the role. Otherwise, negotiating without understanding of the wider context and norms could lead to counterproductive experiences and be confusing for the panel, and inquiry staff, as was the case during this study.

Thus, role clarity and relations are important. When there is clarity, it can lead to increased motivations and satisfactions among staff within the organisation (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Moreover, we understand that the form of the therapeutic contract, a large predictor of fostering a positive therapeutic relationship, is attributed to the contract laid out at the beginning outlining the mutual expectations of the therapist and patient. It contributes to increased sense of containment, and better therapeutic outcomes (Croxtton, 1985). Furthermore, when there is an added predictability and security about the setting and understanding of roles it contributes towards building trust. Accordingly, it indicates how crucial the early stages of role development are for fostering relationships within any institution, therapeutic or employment, and a large predictor of job satisfaction (Robinson & Morrison, 2000) or therapeutic alliance (Howego et al., 2003). A consultative panel is no different. Research in public health bodies has identified three essential foundational aspects, with regards to agenda and priority setting in knowledge production when working alongside lived-experience expertise. These were crucially required to be embedded before any shared decision-making takes place (Pratt, 2021). The three elements include the need for environmental, relational, and personal foundations to be set to enhance and support meaningful engagement. It also found by implementing these, it addressed several barriers to power-sharing, which is a notable proponent of testimonial and epistemic justice (Barker et al., 2023a; Fricker, 2017; Gallen, 2023).

VS' positive experiences of participating at public inquiries has been influentially shaped by the organisational culture. Notably, instilling a dignified (Moran & Salter, 2022) and trauma-informed approach (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b), underlined the institutional awareness and attention paid to minimise the emotional experience of interacting with an organisation. The acknowledgement and recognition of their needs,

signified to VS that there is the potential for a validation, something Herman (1998) depicts as of primary importance. The admission of harm by inquiries therefore can signify support and detract from previously held narratives that they somehow were to blame or deserved their abuse (Lundy, 2020). Moreover, validation and acknowledgement can indicate to VS that they are believed (Clark, 2015) and may contribute to a restoration of a sense of self-worth and identity to VS (Lundy, 2020). It is therefore paramount that whilst careful attention is paid to VS interacting with an inquiry via private and public hearings, and survivor engagement forums, institutional awareness and attention towards a dignified and trauma-informed culture must extend to include the format and role of a lived-experience panel.

This may appear a difficult task, as underlined by previous research, that the VSCP were the co-architects of developing a trauma-informed approach and co-led several trainings at The Inquiry which both staff and VS benefitted from (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b). Nevertheless, inquiries in future when building workstreams will need to themselves carefully consider when setting up the VS consultative panel, how to instil an emotional, agentic, and adaptive infrastructure around the panel which signifies that they are valued and their position, voice, and contributions are of worth to the inquiry. For VS who participate in this consultative way, knowledge distribution and raising awareness are key aspects of their justice motivation, and contributes towards their sense of identity (Herman, 1998; Whittier, 2009; Wright, 2020). As a key staff member identified, there was a purpose and hope that the panel would ask key questions of the 'builders' of the Inquiry. This may have been effective at times, but it became apparent that the space for curiosity perhaps was missed in this dynamic. The panel, whilst frustrated at times, understood the dilemma and could contextualise the behaviour towards them, and the lack of knowledge about CSA as the reason for The Inquiry; but the hurt and frustration was located, as a panel member reflected, in the need of the institution to be perceived to have the answers instead of the questions.

The VSCP as a concept, can be considered an innovative model of participation in a justice mechanism such as a public inquiry, and in practice can contribute towards key justice interests for VS (Daly, 2017; Lundy, 2020). VS justice interests include a meaningful involvement in the shaping of and contribution to justice mechanisms such as public inquiries; this also extends to planning and consideration of the nature and impact of trauma related to child sexual abuse for The Inquiry organisation as a whole, not just for VS' testimonial interactions with the inquiry (Daly, 2017; Hamber & Lundy, 2020). The planning and consideration involved in setting up an inquiry investigating trauma such as child sexual abuse may have initially underestimated the potential emotional and physical impact on inquiry staff involved. Whereas the VSCP's tendency to pay attention to the emotional tenor, overall wellbeing, and expressions of secondary trauma across the inquiry was acutely felt by them. Instead, at times, such secondary effects of trauma could be located in the VSCP, as a representation of an internal survivor group. Bearing this in mind, it could be that the innovative ideas which led to the development of the piloted consultation model, in practice were confronting at times for staff to work in a different dynamic, one which promoted new, emotionally attentive approaches to working with processes focusing on abuse and trauma. It therefore underlines the value for Inquiry management in committing to co-creating and embedding a trauma-informed environment for everyone. Importantly, it also pays attention to key justice interests for VS.

Thus, the agency-knowledge dilemma appears to be both pertinent and encompassed different aspects of experience for the VSCP. Public body research has emphasised the importance of mitigating this dynamic tension by establishing such principles prior to commencing an advisory group (Poverty Alliance, 2020). A commission into poverty and inequalities in Scotland employed a lived-experience advisory panel for its duration. Prior to its commencement, it consulted extensively with poverty alliance community activist group members to understand the priorities of a lived experience consulting group, and how in practice they can meaningfully work with and alongside the

commissioners. It outlined key steps for commissions to make before assigning a panel, and like Pratt (2021) identified that relationships and human elements ought to be prioritised. Panel members' identities are far more than what they bring to the role, offering a breadth of experiences and knowledge as human beings. It too, emphasised the need for role clarity and transparency of limits to their work in the context of the commission as key in managing expectations and fostering trust. It aligns with the institutionalisation of consistent respect, care, and dignity that Moran and Salter (2022) highlight as crucial in demonstrating that the inquiry is committed and interested in all VS' experiences, understanding their viewpoints and suggestion for change, irrespective of participation mode or employment role.

The importance of trustworthiness of an organisation and the state is a central feature that underpins the experience of VS appointment in this research and across existing public inquiry research (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Ireton, 2023). In both their personal history and professional experiences of interacting with government institutions and officials, trustworthiness had been a cautionary experience, and likened to 'snake oil'. Trust, when working with VS of CSA in any capacity, is fundamental. Betrayal of trust is at the heart of a VS experience of CSA (Davies & Frawley, 1994; Stubbley & Young, 2021), and thus, developing a relationship with the VSCP whereby trust could be established was critical. Both IICSA staff and VSCP members' earlier experiences were characterised by a bilateral cautiousness, shaped upon suspicion of causing harm, either to The Inquiry's credibility via passing of information to media outlets, or via omissions and sudden changes in decision-making processes without the panel's consultation. This underscores the importance of developing relationships on a human level first, between lived experience panels and organisations (Pratt, 2021)

Trustworthiness was multifaceted and experienced by the VSCP as precarious. This was particularly evident in their efforts to dispel myths and clarify processes about The Inquiry to improve VS engagement and their experiences. This was a mixed experience, as upon reflection, they believed steps could have been taken to foster trust prior to their

appointment. Despite the initial barriers, a mutual sense of trustworthiness blossomed through reciprocity in workstreams, in particular with the research team and the successful co-development of the Truth Project. This echoes literature identifying the value in shared-power, decision-making, and mutuality for VS roles (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b; Wilson & Goodman, 2021).

Considering the importance of legacy in the work of inquiries, whether it is memorialisation of the abuse, loss, or raising awareness, research has depicted mixed opinions of legacy hopes associated with public inquiries and participation (Barker et al., 2023b; Moore et al., 2023; Lundy, 2020; Wright et al., 2018). The purpose of memorialisation of VS and a public inquiry is intended to provide an important form of public acknowledgement of the abuse within the community (Wright, 2017). Memorialisation across inquiries depict similar intentions in efforts as a reminder to challenge the culture of collective denial (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Wright et al., 2018). IICSA created memorialising benches and plaques to honour VS (IICSA, 2023) and continue to raise awareness about CSA.

The VSCP reflected upon the legacy of IICSA, and their role in The Inquiry. Panel members were united in their hope of contributing to reducing the taboo and stigma in talking publicly about CSA. Being a consultative panel, the importance of communication between the internal structures and externally in the public sphere was paramount. The panel itself often became a 'transitional space' (Salter, 2020) for The Inquiry. There was also a legacy in their power as a consulting collective in continuing to pursue accountability and acknowledgement beyond IICSA. Memorialisation and legacy are also associated with completion and endings. Endings are significant for VS, and are carefully thought about in therapeutic spaces (Garner, 2018; Stubbley & Young, 2021). Reflecting on endings were important to amplify the key difference in meaning for the VSCP and Inquiry staff, in that the work and outcomes held different weight. This was comparable for the VSCP in that this was one job in a staff's career, signalling a passage of time, albeit many staff described as of profound importance to them, whereas this pertains to both their personal and professional

lives, an aspect of their lived experience. Thus, the ending of the investigative processes of IICSA was salient for the panel in that it was not an 'ending' for VSCP members, it was a new iteration in the campaign for justice for VS. This underscores the profound weight of responsibility carried by VS' who lean into the agentic aspects of their survivorship identity, such as those in consultative panel positions, on behalf of all CSA VS and themselves to pursue and deliver justice (Daly, 2016).

5.2. Critique of the Methodological Process and Participatory Framework

The ethics of research and domains of knowledge production is important to consider throughout any project. This research process methodologically, analytically, and in output was a participatory experience. Each stage of the research process was coproduced, in the design of the individual interview guides, the focus group activities, the analytical workshops and formal write-up in the report and journal article. The use of PAR across this project has been a strength, as it has enabled all members of the research team to be active agents in the process. The design was a helpful framework in that the objectives were actionable and for many who participated, its development held personal significance. It demonstrated that whilst action research can be a longer process, in the context of time and personal commitment, it is highly favourable in its ability to generate meaningful change. Furthermore, by working as a collective, it brought together a varied skillset which could be utilised to generate findings that had real life implications.

Support from Research England's Participatory Research Fund enabled the project to be undertaken in a manner that encouraged egalitarianism, agency and power dynamics to be neutralised as much as possible, in line with PAR principles. All participant-researchers were compensated for providing their expertise and time across the two focus group days. It also supported research procedures practically and emotionally, so the project could be managed ethically and with dignity. Having funds to conduct research in this way, enabled

an adaptive process to be undertaken, ensuring that people's accommodation and travel needs were suitably accounted for. Thus, the research aimed to cultivate a sense of dignity that Moran & Salter (2022) refer to, to demonstrate that the research was important and each member of the PAR team's needs and insights were of worth, both for members of the VSCP and the academic research team members. It followed current practice of research utilising this model, emphasising that whilst we were equal stakeholders in the research, we are all humans first (Pratt, 2021). Creating time and the conditions for relationships to be built is important for meaningful co-created research. As such, setting the foundation to foster collegiality and shared interests is important (Cornish et al., 2023). Each member had an active stake in the research outcomes, and thus, efforts were collaborative throughout, creating a participative reality. The project used the skillsets of all members effectively, and research members of the VSCP have utilised the research report and its recommendations to raise awareness and lobby government to change through commission groups and parliamentary and conference events.

The significance of PAR research as both a framework, but also morally as a principle of epistemological justice is critical. Trauma-informed models in research or public bodies, such as NHS England or local trusts, and inquiries, highlight the importance of collaborative aspects of TIA. However, this research has highlighted that structural tensions and limitations to collaboration continue to exist across public bodies in practice (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Taggart et al., in prep). Whilst tensions continue to exist across healthcare, policy, and research processes (Pratt, 2021), we hope that this research contributes to a better understanding of the habitus and epistemology associated with VS roles. As this project was awarded funding to cultivate the emotional, logistical, and environmental conditions to deliver action research, there were important considerations when undertaking this project. These include the question of how this research can be replicated in future? And how does the research field encourage PAR models to be adopted and coproduced meaningfully considering the limited funding available to researchers?

In terms of knowledge creation, PAR's approach to methodological inquiry is useful in challenging and de-centring academic ideals about knowledge production, as it encourages flexibility with a focus to document and challenge existing social practices (Coleman & Ellison, 2023). However, it can be subject to criticisms, particularly if the attempts to change social practices become watered down or depoliticised (Fine & Torre, 2021). There have been some questions posed surrounding methodological rigour, when using PAR. It can be characterised as a challenge to undertake (Wallerstedt & Nislen, 2022) both in terms of time and resource intensive nature, its embracing of multiplicity and prioritisation of voices and relationships first (Cornish et al, 2023), meaning it can be a highly nuanced and 'messy' collective methodological process (Hawkins, 2015). Considering this action research project, as consultative panels were new to non-recent public inquiries, this research provides useful new insights into such experiences of participation. As with latent qualitative methods of inquiry, such as this project, interpretations are subjective and can be influenced by my own context I bring to the research. Additionally, there are mixed reflections on sample sizes in qualitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018). In this research, insights were drawn from eight past and present panel members and five IICSA staff members. Larger sample sizes have been argued as beneficial to enhance the understanding and validity of experience (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Thus, future research in this area is needed to compare and broaden understanding of participation in consultative capacities for VS.

5.3. Implications and Recommendations

5.3.1 Increasing Awareness of VS Contributions and Discussions about CSA

A key motivator which reverberated throughout the VSCP was the importance of this research to raise awareness of the experiences of VS in consulting capacities. Importantly, in line with research aims, VSCP members shared their desire to identify facilitative

experiences and learning from barriers for future inquiries. As the first consultative panel of its kind operating at an inquiry, communicating learnings for members was an important component of creating this study, with the objective to mitigate the challenges faced by the VSCP and improve experiences for future VS panels. This participatory research has produced valuable insights and findings which will be helpful for future inquiries and other public bodies which employ consultants with personal and professional expertise in an area. Findings were coproduced into a policy and practical document, which was a key outcome offering recommendations to policy and public officials in future design of inquiries with consultative VS panels (Wright et al., 2023). This document has been distributed to public officials as part of the lobbying aim of VS to increase awareness about IICSA, and the role of VS.

Moreover, the VSCP members shared widely that it felt important as part of the legacy of IICSA, and of their contributions, was to facilitate and amplify conversations about child sexual abuse, thus breaking down the perceived taboo and culture of avoidance and silence about CSA. This is a commonly held goal of VS (Herman, 1998, 2023; Whittier, 2012; Wright, 2020), and contributes to existing research of VS justice aims around recognition and acknowledgment of the prevalence and impact of CSA (Lundy, 2020; Wright et al., 2018; Wright & Henry, 2019). We therefore hope that this study provides valuable contributions to understanding the work at IICSA in investigating the widespread prevalence and effects of CSA, and an additional dimension to VS participation.

5.3.2. A Trauma-Informed Organisational Culture

As extensively documented in existing literature, VS participation at public inquiries is crucial to its investigations, its findings of the extent and impact of abuse, and understanding of the hopes and expectations around accountability and recognition (Barker et al., 2023; Gallen, 2023; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; McAlinden, 2013; Moran & Salter, 2022; Sköld &

Swain, 2018; Wright, 2017). A fundamental aspect of facilitating this has been in adopting a trauma-informed approach (Barker et al., 2023) or institutional dignity (Moran & Salter, 2022) surrounding the structures and processes which are involved in VS participation. IICSA's trauma-informed approach to cultivate safety, empowerment, and minimise harm was paramount to the success of the Truth Project, and its substantially positive appraisals of participation by VS who contributed in this way (Barker et al., 2023a; Barker et al., 2023b). The findings of this study highlight that overall, the inclusion of a VS panel was an effective model and that co-creation by the VSCP and IICSA staff was possible in some areas. However, the principles of a trauma-informed culture took substantial time and effort to be extended to all aspects of VS participation, such as the VSCP role. A vital implication of this research, therefore, for VSCP members was to recognise the value of adopting a trauma-informed culture into all aspects of the organisation, which crucially includes reciprocity and collaboration with consulting VS within the organisation.

The role of the conduit operating at the Inquiry by 'insider' VS consultants was a crucial one for both the VSCP and The Inquiry to develop credibility as a benign institution for external VS stakeholders. VSCP incorporated this role as a key aspect of their work, and this enhanced trustworthiness of an organisation. However, there was a clear emotional burden of carrying the responsibility to encourage VS engagement and represent their concerns. It is therefore important for inquiries to consider in advance how processes and support structures can minimise emotional responsibility for consulting panels. This could be actionable by consulting with VS alliance groups prior to appointment processes, to understand what emotional and practical support VS may require when undertaking this role.

5.3.3. Role Clarity, Training, and Acknowledgment

An implication of the study and a recommendation identified by all panel members and some IICSA staff is the need for clear and established responsibilities and roles for a VS

panel consulting to an inquiry. The VS consultative role has provided a crucial added dimension and richness to the inquiry's processes. Yet, as the findings of this research indicate, there was limited clarity around the scope and parameters of the role and panel. A recommendation for future inquiries and public bodies incorporating VS consultative panels into their structure is to be clear about the responsibilities and limits to the scope of the role. This will enable expectations to be managed between Inquiry staff and consultants in this capacity. Furthermore, it will provide a sense of containment for the panel, and offer a clearer and containable sense for inquiry staff interacting with members of what the panel's responsibilities are. This has the potential to reduce the sense of uncertainty that was experienced by the VSCP, and instances of avoidance from staff feeling ill-equipped to interact with a panel whose purpose and function had not been made clear to them.

An overarching implication of the findings which both the VSCP and staff spoke of were the differences in norms, practices, and knowledge production between VS, civil service administration and legal profession. The impact of this was described by all who contributed to this research. Several VSCP members identified the need for inductions to be an essential process whereby all staff are trained on trauma-informed cultures, including the VSCP's role in the inquiry and the need for reciprocity across all areas that structures allow. Moreover, induction training for consultant VS on the organisational structures, procedures, and regulations surrounding public inquiries were identified as important by VSCP members at being able to understand their role in the wider context. Members reflected that they often felt as if they were alienated, disempowered by the hierarchal structure, and didn't belong in the organisational culture of the civil service. Thus, the provision of a detailed induction into the practices and culture of the civil service, whilst not overcoming the power-agency barriers surrounding the competing epistemologies, could go some way to reducing feelings of compliance and alienation.

5.4. Self-reflexivity

An aim of PAR research is the potential to be transformational for all involved. This was certainly the case for me. I found the experience of being a member of this research team both emotive and energising. I noticed how my position shifted and merged across various parts of the research process. I was aware of how VSCP members may perceive my entering the research team as an unknown psychologist in training. I was curious how they may perceive my 'outsider' status, with limited 'insider' knowledge of IICSA's processes that members of the scholar team had gained through working at the organisation, and others with scholar expertise in this area. Thus I was aware of the potential for scepticism about my motivations for joining the project.

I noticed that I came with my own preconceptions and curiosities, having read IICSA's final report prior to meeting the VSCP. I observed my confusion about how little reference to the panel there was through the course of the report, and although different now, little information about their purpose, function, and contribution was present on IICSA's website. It left me feeling perplexed, and perhaps a sense that a 'sanitisation' of the VSCP had occurred. I did not have any sense of their character, and thus I was going into this research project with an openness. It makes me think of the civil service's pillar of 'neutrality'. As an 'outsider' researcher in this project, I and my supervisor, Katie Wright, were bringing fresh eyes to a group with an established language and understanding of the workings of IICSA and the VSCP. We were able to bring the essence of 'objective' observations in the focus group and interviews. However, my social, psychological, and cultural positioning, shaped by my experiences as a psychologist in training, and in my lived experiences of navigating complex trauma meant I was actively conscious of my own bias, and how I brought my habitus into this research. I mitigated this by writing a reflective journal throughout the research process.

The emotion was palpable throughout the focus groups, as both galvanising energy and excitement, and a means to express frustration and injustice felt about specific memories and barriers faced. Also at times, it was profoundly moving reflecting upon more painful experiences and the impact upon them personally, and moving in the visceral sense of hope and connection gained from working as a collective. I noticed in the countertransference I left the first workshop feeling aggrieved and sceptical about hope for an integrated experience for VS panels. I did not know if I was carrying a despondency related to my own anxieties and disappointment in hearing the experiences, but I also held in mind that memories recalled during the first day of focus groups had been predominantly dynamic challenges faced and this was an opportunity to process those experiences; therefore I observed and acknowledged that I was left with the visceral frustration at the disempowerment which was at times present in the room. The second day left a sense of hopefulness in me about the legacy of lived-experience panels consulting in this capacity. The rollercoaster of emotions they'd been through were experienced in the room.

When conducting the individual interviews in collaboration with Associate Professor Katie Wright, I became aware of the struggles of the panel between the individual motivations and experiences from the collective identity that was present in the focus groups. It brought a new layer of dynamics to consider, and I noticed I felt a great responsibility to balance, capture, and communicate both sets of experiences that were shared. It gave resonant meaning to the difficulty the VSCP faced about representation and being presented as a collective panel to the public survivor sphere, with differing intersecting identities and perspectives.

I noticed a key reflection for me was the ability to be creative and collaborative throughout the process with the VSCP members. This research reaffirmed my values in co-production, as I was most enriched by the process when developing analytic ideas and themes, bringing together our multiple lenses. It demonstrated to me that PAR should

always be flexible, and whilst we may endeavour to be collaborative across all aspects of the process, ulterior needs may conflict, and ultimately this may not be possible. In this case, the need for confidence and security around confidentiality was prioritised as a group regarding the handling and analysis of individual interview data. It meant for me that my own perceptions around participatory research evolved, and instead incorporated an important element of epistemological thinking. This meant reflecting on the importance of fostering trust. Acknowledging the reality that perhaps at times The Inquiry may have recreated challenging or painful dynamics felt important. Therefore, instead offering a space where individual members could candidly process and describe their experiences was of greater need. Moreover, in documenting these experiences freely I could identify that perhaps a degree of anonymity felt important by being identified as 'panel member' rather than by their individual appointment. It left me with an understanding of the lasting responsibility felt for VSCP members to protect the integrity and legacy of IICSA, but also the enduring power and emotional implications that members have previously experienced and could face outside of the organisation by VS stakeholders, the mass media, and future public bodies.

The review of the literature and meta-ethnography signified to me the journey which remains for VS' experiences of participation. My initial impression was surprise at the limited research documenting CSA VS experiences of participation at a public inquiry. As such, expanding the scope out to include all aspects of child abuse, and staff perceptions felt important to draw comparable findings and gain insights into the potential benefits and challenges to bearing witness, testifying and consulting to public inquiries. I was also struck by how comparable the findings were, and this left me feeling somewhat disappointed and frustrated that the dilemma remains for VS around public testimonial processes and left me questioning whether the current justice paradigm is wholly suited for VS giving voice and their justice aims. Gallen's (2020) sentiment that "power remains out of the hands of victim-survivors" (p35) felt poignant for me after conducting the synthesis; however, it gave me hope to see that more recent studies at larger inquiries have carefully considered the

institutional culture, particularly adopting a psychological framework that has enhanced the emotional experience for VS contributing to the process.

This valuable experience has resulted in me reflecting on the process of co-production in public health settings. Many models of psychotherapy characterise a key development of the therapeutic alliance by its collaborative relationship between client and therapist. It has left me wondering how I can extend my evolved and adaptive perception of participatory research moving forward into my clinical settings alongside potential lived-experience consultant panels or experts by lived experience that I may work with. It makes me curious as to how this can be translated in practice and in structures within the NHS. I wonder whether similar facilitators and barriers would be comparable to the experiences of the VSCP, particularly around power-agency dynamics and establishing role clarity. Of importance in this context, it made me reflect on the limits that people in expert by lived experience positions may encounter, particularly in suggestions of adapting standardised processes which funding relies on. This may be inclusive of outcome measures, or the following of evidence-based practice via NICE guidelines, which perhaps experts by lived-experience will have views about, but limited scope to adapt or influence.

5.5. Conclusion

This action research has provided valuable insights into understanding and learning from survivor epistemology operating at public inquiries. It highlighted aspects of strength and integration between the VSCP and public inquiries, and what could be accomplished differently considering the barriers faced by the panel. Integration between the structural components of inquiries, and the emotional experiential design and understanding the VSCP offered were identified, which can be replicated effectively for future panels. The VSCP were central in the development of policy and processes that effectively enabled an efficacious interaction for VS with The Inquiry, particularly across the Truth Project. The research also

documented the value of a VSCP being embedded as part of The Inquiry in enhancing channels of communication about the inquiry and between key stakeholders. Notably, positive appraisals were tied into reciprocity and a demonstration of their value and worth. The most esteemed responsibilities, therefore, were associated with facilitating discussions between IICSA and VS, building public awareness of CSA, and collaborating on research projects within IICSA. The research also identified several barriers across different aspects of working in this role, which were broadly encompassed by the cultural and epistemological tensions operating at The Inquiry. Of note contributing to the cultural and epistemological tensions, was the lack of clarity to the appointment itself, which as outlined, led to breakdowns in trust bilaterally, less opportunity of reciprocity in working relations, and an experience of otherness across The Inquiry, and hostility from outside VS stakeholders. The participatory research underscored the personal cost and impact of the panel, including heightened feelings of responsibility, and experiences of disempowerment and re-traumatisation. As a new domain of participation in public inquiries, it depicts comparable experiences to existing literature on testimonial and redress participation for VS. In understanding the factors that contributed to the barriers and tensions of a lived experience consultative panel, future inquiries can use the learnings to mitigate these. It also underscores the importance of understanding VS habitus and attending to a trauma-informed culture, particularly relating to the need for role clarity, to the integration of emotions, agency, and empowerment in communication and structures of the public inquiry field.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Table 1: A Sample of Key Study Details and Concepts

<p>Focal Study Details Purpose</p>	<p>Pembroke (2019) Reviewing VS' experiences and motivations for participating in The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) in Ireland and Redress Scheme.</p>
<p>Setting Sample Data collection</p>	<p>Republic of Ireland 19 men and 6 women Semi-structured Interviews</p>
<p>Key Concepts</p>	
<p>Giving Voice and Acquiring Recognition</p>	<p>This was mixed. A minority of VS likened a positive appraisal with receiving a validating response following participation; however the majority reported negative experiences associated with limiting scope to give voice, and instead being scrutinised through cross-examination processes.</p>
<p>A Culture of Integrity</p>	<p>A lack of honesty and transparency were shared widely among VS. Notably, decisions about redress settlements were made without VS' knowledge, and understanding was not clarified about implications of participatory processes, leaving VS regretful and fearful about their involvement.</p>
<p>Justice Aims and Reparation</p>	<p>VS reported overwhelming sense of injustice at lack of criminal prosecutions or public naming of those investigated or identified as responsible.</p>
<p>Settings</p>	<p>VS described feeling intimidated and exposed by both the public hearing and redress panel settings, likening them to feeling 'on trial'.</p>
<p>Meaningful Agency and Adaptability</p>	<p>VS reported limited control or choice over the ways in which they could testify. This resulted in feelings of disempowerment, frustration, and devaluation.</p>
<p>Systems of Support</p>	<p>VS described isolation, particularly associated with an absence of inquiry follow-up support at key moments, such as following redress hearings.</p>
<p>Third-order Interpretations: Explanation/theory</p>	<p>The moral and emotional habitus of VS revealed an expectation of symbolic and material acknowledgment of harm, considering VS' emotional need for safety and transparency, and public accountability. Predominantly disappointment, disempowerment, and re-traumatisation were experienced. Notably this was when settings and formats of participation appeared to prioritise the legal and bureaucratic structures of the public inquiry over the emotional habitus of a safe, dignified, and transparent experience for VS.</p>

Appendix B. Table 2: A Conceptual Comparison of Studies

	Colton et al (2002)	Hamber & Lundy (2020)	Pemb- roke (2019)	Barker et al (2023a)	Lundy (2020)	Moran & Salter (2022)	Barker et al (2023b)
Giving Voice and Acquiring Recognition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Justice aims and Reparation	✓	✓	✓		✓		
A Culture of Integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Setting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meaningful Agency and Adaptability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Systems of Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Project Title

Developing a model of victim-survivor participation in public inquiries: Policy lessons and recommendations for the UK and internationally

Invitation

The purpose of this document is to provide you with information on the project, which may help to determine whether you would like to collaborate in this research. If you could read through the information below, this summarises the rationale for the project and what your involvement as participant-researchers would entail.

Purpose of this Research

The aim of this research project is to collaboratively explore the process of consulting public inquiries from the perspective of victims and survivors. Specifically, understanding how individuals who are involved in consulting with the recent Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) locate their experiences of participation on the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel (VSCP). By exploring this, the project aims to uncover the values and insights to working on an inquiry, and the reflections of victims and survivors testimony and consultation in seeking justice. In doing so, it could highlight the social and clinical implications of public inquiry involvement for individuals with living experiences of CSA, and provide policy guidelines around participation to future inquiries.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to collaborate on this project, as you were a member of the victims and survivors consultative panel in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), and were actively involved throughout the process of this inquiry. As such, your perspective is invaluable to co-create this research. We aim to include insights from as many members as possible who were a part of the Victim and Survivors Consultative Panel, and staff who worked closely with the VSCP or Truth Project, to understand the nuances of experiences and positions across the panel.

Do I have to take part?

There is no obligation to participate in this research. You can change your mind about taking part at any point in the research process, and this will be respected. You are also not required to give a reason for doing so.

If you are uncertain of your involvement in the research and are considering withdrawing your personal data, you can request this up until six months post-collection. You can email the researcher directly if you would like to proceed with withdrawing, and they can destroy your data.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

You will make up part of a participatory action research team. This will mean that your participation will be both as a participant, and as a co-researcher during the analysis process. This will mean attending two focus groups and collaborating with other members of the VSCP or staff members who worked closely with you. Each focus group will last up to two and a half hours, over the course of two consecutive days. It can be attended either in person at the University of Essex, or remotely via Zoom. The focus groups will include an exploration of your experiences of the inquiry you were involved in, and collaborative insights on a participatory framework for future inquiries.

It may involve one additional individual interview with the project researchers either on an online platform or in person which you can opt in for. The interview will be up to 60 minutes long and would involve a discussion about your individual experiences of the inquiry. The interview and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed in order for us to capture your viewpoints as closely as possible.

How will my information be stored?

After the interview process is complete, the recordings will be securely held for analysis over a period of six months. Once this period is complete, your recording will be safely destroyed. Transcript data is confidentially stored for up to ten years. With your consent, it also may be re-used for publications or research in future.

Your data will be held securely throughout the research process in a password-encrypted folder using a university Box cloud service, in accordance with GDPR guidance. You will be sent a copy of the transcribed focus groups you collaborated on. The focus group data collected will only be viewed and accessed by the group members and co-researchers. If you contribute in individual interviews also, you will also be provided with a copy of your personal interview data.

Will it be confidential?

This will be your decision throughout. You have the option to be publicly identifiable during the research process or can request that parts or all of your data remain confidential. If you request this, all data which contains identifiable information of any contributor will be redacted or will be anonymised with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Although details on the members of the panel are publicly accessible, data that compromises your confidentiality will not be included in the collation of this research.

You will also have the opportunity to give feedback via email on the findings chapter of this research project prior to its submission, to ensure that you are comfortable with the representation of your data, and that it accurately reflects the analysis and themes that emerged during the workshops and interviews.

What are the possible disadvantages or benefits of being involved?

Your involvement would require setting aside time to collaborate in focus group workshops and an additional interview. It may also involve collaborating on findings and guidance emerging from the workshops. We understand how valuable your time is, and may be an important factor for your consideration.

Additionally, you may have worked during some valuable and challenging experiences, and therefore there is the potential that a discussion could unexpectedly cause unease or discomfort. You can excuse yourself at any point throughout the group process and clinical staff are on hand to debrief during or after the workshops.

This project is funded by the University of Essex's Participatory Research Fund, and therefore accommodation, dinner and lunch will be provided. Additionally, you will be paid a bursary of £200 per day of attendance, up to a total of £600, for your time and involvement throughout the workshops. If you withdraw your attendance to all the workshops, unfortunately you will be unable to receive a bursary.

Your insights could provide to a greater understanding of the process involved in an inquiry from the perspective of individuals with living experiences of CSA, and your contributions could be invaluable in illustrating this.

Your insights could also help to shape future inquiries, highlighting the clinical and practical implications of the process on individuals with living experiences. Additionally, your perspectives could raise awareness on how to effectively minimise any harm incurred in the inquiry process in future.

What should I do if I want to be involved?

If you are satisfied and would like to proceed in collaborating on this project, please contact the research team below by 5th April 2023 and confirm your interest and whether you wish to attend in person or online. The workshops and interview will take place on the 17th and 18th of April. If you have any additional questions about the project, please contact the researchers directly.

This research is compliant with GDPR principles. As such, your consent will need to be obtained prior to the day. This can be accomplished by filling out the participant consent form which will be emailed once you have confirmed your availability to attend the workshops, and returned via email to the researchers.

How is my data controlled?

Your data is controlled by the University of Essex. If you have any further questions about this, you can contact the University Information Assurance Manager (email dpo@essex.ac.uk).

Who has reviewed this evaluation?

This project has gained ethical approval from the University of Essex, Health and Social Care Research Ethics Sub-Committee 2.

Concerns or Complaints

If you have a concern about an feature of the study, please initially contact the primary researcher, Hannah Griffin. Their details are provided below. If you continue to have concerns and regard your complaint as not being addressed to your satisfaction, or feel uncomfortable to approach the lead researcher, please contact the departmental Director of Research responsible for this project, [name], [email].

If you continue to remain concerned following this, please contact the University's [role], [name] [email]. Please include the ERAMS reference which can be found at the foot of this page.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Individuals involved in the research project:

Researcher: Hannah Griffin, Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Email: hq21722@essex.ac.uk

Supervised by: Dr. Danny Taggart, Academic Director, University of Essex

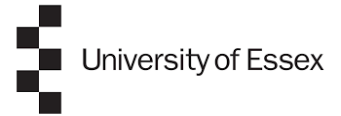
Email: [\[email\]](#)

Co-supervised by: Associate Professor Katie Wright, Associate Professor, La Trobe University

Email: [\[email\]](#)

Appendix D. Consent Form

5.



CONSENT FORM

Project: *Developing a model of victim-survivor participation in public inquiries: Policy lessons and recommendations for the UK and internationally.*

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 09.02.2023 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project prior to the workshops, or withdraw my personal data at any time up until three months after without giving any reason.

3. I understand that information I provide will be used for academic research and may be subject to publication

4. I understand that being a participant researcher involves me attending up to two focus groups either remotely or in person.

5. I understand I can opt in to offer additional insights by individual interview.

6. I understand that the research will be recorded and will remain confidential. The recording will only be available to the academic researchers, and will be destroyed once analysed.

7. I understand that I have the choice of anonymity. Personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name, will not be shared beyond the academic researchers unless I state otherwise.

8. I understand I can request to change between being identifiable or anonymous at any point during the project. If I choose to anonymise my data, I understand that personally identifiable aspects may be altered or redacted to preserve my confidentiality.

9. I wish to remain anonymous/be identified during this research project. (*please circle one*)

10. I understand that the information collected about me could be used to support other research in the future, and may be accessed by other researchers. I choose for my data to be stored anonymously/be identifiable (*please circle one*).

11. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant-researcher

Date

Signature

Name of Person seeking consent

Date

Signature

Appendix E. Interview Guide

Purpose of the panel

- 1) How did the development of the victims and survivors consultative panel for The Inquiry come about?
- 2) What was your journey to becoming a member of the VSCP?

Process of the Inquiry

- 3) What did your involvement look like throughout the Inquiry?
- 4) Were there any parts of the Inquiry process that stood out for you?
- 5) Could you tell us about any positive experiences you had during The Inquiry?
- 6) Did you face any barriers throughout your experiences on the panel?

Appraisals of participation

- 7) What did it mean for you to be involved in this inquiry?
- 8) How did you find working with other staff involved in The Inquiry?
- 9) What have you taken away from your experiences on the VSCP?

Outcomes and recommendations of the inquiry

- 10) How did you find reading The Inquiry report and its recommendations?
- 11) How did you feel about what was included in the report?
- 12) What, if anything, do you think was not captured in the report or recommended outcomes?
- 13) What have been your experiences of institutional responses to The Inquiry findings and recommendations so far?
- 14) What do you hope to be the legacy of IICSA?
- 15) What do you hope to be the legacy of the VCSP involvement?