“I just wanted to be heard”: The experiences of sexual abuse survivors interviewed by journalists

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Abstract

Background: Disclosure of sexual abuse and its impact on survivors are areas that have been researched extensively. Although research has explored trauma survivor experiences of interacting with the media, there are gaps in the research examining the experiences of sexual abuse survivors. Trauma-Informed Journalism guidelines have been developed from research, offering journalists practical ways for engaging with trauma survivors in ethical and sensitive ways. Sexual abuse survivors face specific psychological and social challenges that may differ from those of trauma survivors. Therefore, there is a need for research that focuses on their experiences in speaking to journalists. **Aim:** The research aimed to explore the experiences of sexual abuse survivors being interviewed by journalists in the UK. Research questions focused on the motivations of survivors when speaking out to journalists, the impact of being interviewed and participants' suggestions for future journalistic interviews. **Methods:** Sexual abuse survivors were recruited through the distribution of the study poster by a media support organisation and word of mouth through participants of the study. 15 individuals who self-identified as sexual abuse survivors with experience of being interviewed by journalists, participated in semi-structured interviews. **Results:** Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to interpret four themes from the interviews with survivors: Interviews create purpose and empowerment, An act of collaboration, Challenges faced in the interview process, "Treat them as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews. **Conclusions:** Survivors highlighted various journalistic practice that mirrored the sexual abuse, and aspects of interviews that supported or hindered their healing. The themes suggest that changes in journalistic practice, understanding and education in trauma are required to meet the individual needs of sexual abuse survivors. Further research investigating the views of journalists on themes from this study is needed to explore ways to implement practical changes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter Overview

This thesis aims to explore the experiences of sexual abuse survivors around being interviewed by journalists in the United Kingdom (UK). This chapter provides background information to the project: definitions of key terms, an overview of the literature surrounding disclosure of sexual abuse, differences between disclosure and speaking out, and a consideration of the role of journalism. This chapter also includes a meta-ethnography of literature examining the experiences of trauma survivors in speaking out about their story. Gaps in this literature will be identified and a rationale for the study will be offered.

Growing research into sexual abuse highlights that disclosure of and speaking out about sexual abuse tend to be intentional and a tool towards healing, depending on the responses of others (Tener & Murphy, 2015). Trauma has been covered in the media by journalists for many years. The role of journalists involves bringing awareness to issues that may not have otherwise be spoken about, such as sexual abuse (Bradley & Heywood, 2024, p.9). Furthermore, journalists can ensure that those who are responsible for crimes are held accountable (such as perpetrators or authorities) and convey the support that people need (Gearing, 2013; Healey, 2020). As the use of social media has increased over the years and individuals have access to stories of similar experiences, the voices of sexual abuse survivors are being heard more.

Whilst sharing one's sexual abuse story can be beneficial, literature exploring the impact of being interviewed by journalists has been minimal, even more so in the UK. This study was conducted to consider the voices of survivors and allow them to express their views on being interviewed by journalists. This is a vital direction to take in order to offer recommendations for future research and journalistic practice.

Understanding Trauma

Trauma is an event or situation that is perceived or felt as life-threatening or harmful, which can include sexual abuse, loss of loved ones, natural disasters and accidents (American Psychological Association, 2024). The type and severity of symptoms experienced by individuals will vary substantially (Weinberg & Gil, 2016). Therefore, references to 'trauma', 'traumatic event', 'difficulties' or 'trauma symptoms' will be made in the present research with an awareness of the subjective nature of experiences.

When referring to people who have experienced trauma, there has been a shift in the use of 'survivors' rather than 'victims' of trauma (Ben-David, 2020). Previous literature has stated that the first identity people often identify with when they have experienced trauma, is that of a victim. This reflects what happened to the person, whereas the term survivor reflects the person beyond the event and the potential growth that may occur after the event (Pollino, 2023). Particularly as individuals develop resources and move beyond feeling shame, the term survivor is adopted. Although every individual who experiences a traumatic event has different preferences, general discourse suggests that 'survivor' is a more empowering word to use which refers to the strength one gains throughout their subsequent healing process (SAKI, 2015). The term 'trauma survivors' will be used to refer to individuals who have experienced any traumatic event including but not limited to sexual abuse, robbery, shootings, traffic fatalities and natural disasters. This distinction is made to differentiate between sexual abuse survivors and the wider category of trauma survivors throughout this thesis.

Over the years, researchers and clinicians have disagreed around the definition of trauma and diagnostic labels. Initial psychological understanding of trauma impact was developed in response to social context. Such context involved the consequences of war on veterans and women, eventually leading to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) being included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - 3rd Edition (DSM-III) in 1987 (Friedman et

al., 2014; Maercker, 2021). The DSM-III defined PTSD as the existence of a recognisable stressor that would cause significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone, adults or children. However, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - 5th Edition (DSM-5) added a nuanced view to PTSD. This included events posing actual or perceived threats which could be directly experienced by a person, witnessed or heard of as they occurred to others including loved ones, or encountered through repeated exposure to aversive details of an event such as police officers being exposed to details of abuse (Marx et al., 2024). The symptoms from the DSM-5 offer a broad array of symptoms that can overlap with other mental health difficulties. These include intrusions, reduced interest in significant events, feeling detached from others and negative emotional states that must be present for more than one month and have a significant impact on daily functioning. The International Classification of Diseases - 11th revision (ICD-11) gives room for PTSD symptoms including re-experiencing a traumatic event, avoidance behaviours and hyperarousal, which should be present for several weeks and have a negative impact on daily functioning (UK Trauma Council, n.d.).

As understanding around PTSD has developed, it has been recognised that PTSD does not capture chronic trauma rooted especially in interpersonal abuse. Therefore, Herman (1992) proposed Complex PTSD (CPTSD) which explains the impact of early onset and prolonged trauma after researching child sexual abuse and domestic violence survivors. CPTSD is not found in the DSM-5 but can be found in the ICD-11 with the requirement that the original PTSD criteria is met in addition to disturbances in self-organisation (DSO). DSO includes difficulties regulating emotions, negative self-concept (e.g. guilt and shame) and interpersonal problems which impact the maintenance of relationships (Cruz et al., 2022; Giourou et al., 2018). Research has found that the association between cumulative childhood trauma (particularly sexual and physical abuse by caregivers) and CPTSD was stronger than the association with PTSD (Cloitre et al., 2019). This is due to a prolonged violation of bodily

autonomy, betrayal of trust and the impact on identity during a critical developmental period (Herman, 1992, 2012). Therefore, Herman (2002) proposed that recovery from childhood trauma proceeds in three stages which include establishing safety, having space to retell the story and an opportunity to reconnect with others. According to the proposal, the element of establishing safety takes precedence over the other two stages since without safety, no therapeutic work can be implemented. Elements of safety include a person's control of their body (including sleep, eating, exercise and management of PTSD symptoms and abstinence from substance abuse) and subsequently, a control over the environment they are in (such as safe living situation, finances and self-protection in daily life).

However, despite the level of detail offered by CPTSD in explaining chronic and interpersonal trauma, it is criticised for not capturing the developmental consequences of trauma when this is experienced at critical stages of childhood (Courtois & Ford, 2009). Developmental Trauma (DT), referred to as Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) after childhood neglect or abuse, has been proposed to address this gap. DTD emerges from prolonged and cumulative interpersonal trauma during childhood development, disrupts interpersonal attachments and compromises the individual's safety (Cruz et al., 2022). Often, DTD leads to the development of CPTSD. As opposed to PTSD and CPTSD that look at symptom clusters, there is a focus of the impact developmental trauma has on cognitive, emotional, behavioural and relational capacities within DTD. Individuals with characteristics of DTD who are living in persistent states of fear can have difficulties in tolerating ambiguity, poor self-identity development (including shame and self-loathing), diminished awareness of bodily states, and difficulties with relationships (Crittenden & Heller, 2017; Schimmenti & Caretti, 2016; Van der Kolk et al., 2009). The symptoms of DTD have been linked to higher rates of addiction to substances, self-harm and social withdrawal, due to fear of being stigmatised or retraumatised (Cruz et al., 2022). The severity of the symptoms for DTD can be

dependent on the type of trauma experienced, their attachment style and the support available to the individual. Even though most of the literature refers to childhood development, it has been argued that DTD can be relevant to single event trauma in adulthood (Bremness & Polzin, 2014). Trauma can alter the adult brain regardless of the type of trauma (Solomon & Heide, 2005); therefore, a developmental approach would consider the ongoing changes within an individual (child or adult) and their interactions with their environment. Although the use of DTD was favoured to offer an understanding of the spectrum of impact trauma has on individuals and specialised support (Schmid et al., 2013), the diagnosis was not included in the DSM and ICD. The diagnostic manuals aim to offer clear and operationalisable descriptions of disorders and the corresponding symptoms. Therefore, since the characteristics of DTD overlap with those of other disorders and offers a broad lens to view trauma from, it was not deemed appropriate for the diagnostic manuals.

The Manifestation of Trauma

Alongside considering the definitions and symptoms of trauma, it is crucial to understand the lifelong impact of trauma on individuals. In the definition of PTSD, symptoms such as intrusive memories are characteristics of the disorder (American Psychological Association, 2024). The experience of reliving the traumatic event in the present distinguishes the intrusive memories that appear in PTSD compared to other disorders such as depression (Brewin, 2015). Studies that have looked at subjective reports of significant events found that there are clear differences in the way traumatic events are stored and recalled compared to everyday memories. As everyday memories lose clarity over time, traumatic memories can be stable and remain vivid suggesting that traumatic memories may be encoded differently (Van der Kolk, 1998; Brewin, 2001). These experiences of "reliving" the traumatic event are often referred to as flashbacks. Flashbacks are defined as the involuntary re-experiencing of traumatic memories in the present (Brewin, 2001). They are inescapable immersion into the

situation that results in a state of intense fear and helplessness (Brewin, 2014). Both internal and external processes (thinking about a trauma versus exposure to external cues) have been implicated in triggering flashbacks (Van der Kolk, 1998, 2014). External cues include reminders of the event or perpetrator through senses, locations, words or the behaviour of others.

Additionally, experiencing a flashback can lead to dissociation too. Dissociation is a response to traumatic or high stress situations in which there are disruptions in the integration of an individual's consciousness, thoughts, feelings, behaviours and memories, leading to disruptions in memory and consciousness (Dalenberg et al., 2020). This can manifest itself in distortion of time and space (Van der Hart et al., 2004). During threat, dissociation can be adaptive as it can aid temporary separation of emotionally overwhelming memories from everyday memories (Panzer & Viljoen, 2004). However, this becomes maladaptive with persistent dissociation where the individual is hypervigilant in the absence of actual danger occurs. Specifically, leading to emotional numbing, identity fragmentation and memory difficulties which can have a detrimental impact on daily functioning (Van der Hart et al., 2004).

Following on from this, retelling one's account of the trauma can lead to reliving the experience and dissociating due to the mind and body assuming that the trauma is happening in the present. Retelling one's story can serve the functions of replaying trauma events by considering alternative outcomes to what happened and ultimately, assigning blame (either to oneself or the perpetrator). However, research has found that retelling ones story is not straightforward since the narrations can vary based on who trauma survivors are communicating with (Brewin, 2001). For example, individuals may be able to only share minimal details with an acquaintance but extensive information to police or loved ones. Furthermore, when retelling their experiences, trauma survivors can struggle with the same memory on one day but feel more

able to manage their physical and emotional reactions to the memory on another day (Horowitz & Reidbord, 2014). Whilst trauma survivors do experience flashbacks, most individuals can also recall memories of the event in ways that do not manifest in a flashback. Brewin et al. (1996) proposed a dual-representation model of PTSD to aid understanding of the differences in memory retrieval. Verbally Accessible Memories (VAM) includes details that were attended to and processed during traumatic events. These memories are those that trauma survivors use when voluntarily retelling their experience. On the other hand, Situationally Accessible Memories (SAM) are unconscious, sensory and emotional memories, that can present as flashbacks. Such memories are retrieved when there are similarities between the physical features or meaning of one's immediate environment, and those of the trauma experience. This theory suggests that PTSD symptoms can occur as a result of a disconnection between the VAM and SAM during trauma, leading to flashbacks and dissociation. The qualities (the level of detail and impact on an individual) of both types of memories can be affected by the severity of trauma, and time that has elapsed since the trauma.

Overall, memories of trauma and the impact they have on individuals are not straightforward to understand. Although there are similarities in terms of the nature of traumas individuals can experience, there can be differences in the specific contributors to every trauma reaction. This is applicable to sexual abuse too. Therefore, this study will focus on the nuances of trauma from sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse definitions

Throughout this thesis, sexual abuse has been used as the umbrella term to encompass all types of interpersonal sexual trauma that an individual may experience, including child sexual abuse (SSAIC, n.d.). Sexual abuse refers to any sexual behaviour that occurs without consent or understanding, often committed against a child, adolescent or a vulnerable adult. Such acts can be verbal, physical or coercive in nature, and be accompanied by a power

imbalance where the power is held by the perpetrator (e.g. child and adult or a parishioner and priest; World Health Organization, n.d.). This violates an individual's sense of autonomy and control over their own body (Chaudhury et al., 2017).

'Healing' after sexual abuse is preferred over 'recovery' or 'coping with' by some survivors as it has a focus on the dynamic and laborious features of life after sexual abuse (Draucker et al., 2011). Healing is not a linear process and involved revisiting the abuse to process it (Rape Crisis Scotland, n.d.). Healing is associated with seeing the abuse within the context of their whole life, living the life they want, understanding their reactions and talking about abuse to help others. At times healing and recovery are used interchangeably in the literature (Draucker et al., 2009).

Additionally, the term 'experiences' is a multi-faceted phenomenon that refers to the social, psychological and physiological factors that can impact the way people view or engage with the world (Fox, 2008). It can be used to discuss what happened to an individual, to explore similarities and differences between people, or the reflections an individual has after an event. Thus, the differences in the experiences survivors have during and after their interactions with journalists is considered throughout this thesis.

1.1.1 Sexual abuse prevalence

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending March 2020 estimated that 773,000 adults over the age of 16 experienced sexual offences over the last year (Office for National Statistics, 2021). For the year ending March 2022, 1.1 million adults over the age of 16 reported experienced sexual offences over that last year (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The aforementioned data suggests an increase in the reports of sexual assault from 2020 to 2022. Furthermore, sexual abuse prevalence has been found to be higher for women than men, a finding that is reflective of sexual offences being less understood and underreported for men (Borumandnia et al., 2020).

In terms of child sexual abuse, there was a 15% increase in the police records from 2021 to 2022 in England and Wales (Karsna & Bromley, 2023). For the year ending March 2019, CSEW found that 7.5% (approximately 3.1 million) of adults aged 18 to 74 years old reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 16 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). In relation to those reporting child sexual abuse, the CSEW found that survivors were most likely to have been sexually abused by someone they knew, such as neighbours and acquaintances of oneself or one's family.

As internet usage has grown over the years, conversations around sexual abuse have increased. For instance, a website founded by Laura Bates in 2012 allowed people to submit their personal stories surrounding everyday sexism, including stories of rape, childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment and gender discrimination (Melville et al., 2019). Within three years an online community developed, as displayed by there being over 100,000 submissions in more than 13 different languages. A different example of the power of the internet is social media usage. The Me-Too movement was started in 2017, aiming to expose the previously hidden stories of sexual abuse in everyday society and Hollywood (Mendes et al., 2018). The movement quickly went from a hashtag on Twitter to a worldwide movement aiming to raise awareness and seek support (Gallagher et al., 2019). Levy and Mattsson (2023) found that the number of reported sex crimes increased by 8% after the Me-Too movement. They confirmed this by comparing countries with strong and weak relations to the movement and found that countries that supported the movement strongly had higher sex-crime reports. Reportedly through the Me-Too movement, survivors disclose sexual abuse, share the impact sexual abuse has on them and advocate for other survivors (Alaggia & Wang, 2020). The researchers found that this safe space was the complete opposite of the lack of support offered by others in their lives and legal systems. Overall, commonalities in survivor accounts globally and gender

differences in reporting sexual abuse, highlight the importance of understanding the sexual abuse impact across various contexts and barriers to sexual abuse conversations.

Sexual abuse impact

Sexual abuse and trauma can leave profound scars beyond physical violation, including psychological and social difficulties. For example, sexual abuse has been found to have significant adverse effects on the development and adjustment of children and adolescents (Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995), similar to those mentioned earlier for DTD. Additionally, mental health outcomes are mediated by various factors including the age of onset of sexual abuse, duration and recency of abuse, relationship to the perpetrator and the severity of the sexual abuse such as whether penetration was involved (Campbell et al., 2009; Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012; Downing et al., 2021). Such differences in sexual abuse experiences therefore make it challenging to reach consensus on the definitive outcomes of this trauma type.

The Traumagenic Dynamics Model (TDM) conceptualised the impact of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Finkelhor, 1987) through four trauma-causing factors labelled as traumagenic dynamics. Each dynamic is generalised and can be related to various forms of trauma. However, the combination of all four dynamics offers an understanding of the unique long-term developmental effects of sexual abuse on a person's self-concept, view of the world and emotional state. 1) Traumatic sexualisation is the first dynamic, referring to the inappropriate and coercive ways that a child's sexuality can be shaped. 2) Betrayal is the second dynamic, highlighting the violation of trust either from the perpetrator who may be someone the survivor trusted or others who do not believe that the abuse occurred. Survivors who are not believed can experience a greater sense of betrayal compared to those that are supported (Domhardt et al., 2015; Liem et al., 1996), which can create negative schemas about the self, others and the world. 3) Powerlessness reflects an inability to stop the abuse, and feelings of hopelessness especially when others do not help or believe a survivor of sexual

abuse. 4) Finally, stigmatisation is a dynamic which can develop from societal reactions to the abuse. It can also be created when the perpetrator reinforces feelings of shame and guilt, or pressurises the individual to keep the abuse a secret. Societal narratives as seen by the many stories on www.everydaysexism.com (Melville et al., 2019) can scrutinise the behaviours of survivors and the credibility of their stories, which can exacerbate self-blame or guilt. This creates the notion that there is an "ideal victim" for example, survivors that were visibly traumatised and emotional were more legitimate whereas survivors that wear revealing clothing are blamed (Eelmaa & Murumaa-Mengel, 2022). These dynamics explain why survivors may experience internalising problems such as depression, anxiety, self-blame, and social withdrawal later on in life (Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995).

Although social elements have been briefly addressed in the TDM, Maercker and Horn (2013) developed the Socio-Interpersonal Model (SIM) to further understand trauma types including sexual abuse (during childhood and adulthood). The SIM compliments existing models of trauma and claims that both the experience of trauma and recovery occur within a relational environment. More specifically, the model proposes that individuals are surrounded by three levels of social contexts. At the individual level, the model integrates the cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses after sexual abuse such as anger, social withdrawal, suppression of trauma memories, shame and self-blame (Brewin et al., 1996; Maercker & Hecker, 2016). The second level of the SIM is close relationships, which emphasises the importance of supportive or negative responses (including blaming the survivor) from others. Finally, at the societal level, there is emphasis on the societal and cultural views of sexual abuse and survivors. Offering validation and an avoidance of asking about explicit details around the sexual abuse can reduce the level of shame and anxiety experienced by the individual, thereby strengthening the quality of a survivor's relationships and integration with their community (Carranza & Bueno-Guerra, 2025; Lee & Choi, 2024). However, dismissive responses can

reinforce a sense of betrayal and powerlessness whilst potentially delaying one's path to healing (Scoglio et al., 2022), mirroring the dynamics presented within the TDM. Moreover, societal assumptions around what sexual abuse is and who perpetrators are, can skew societal reactions to sexual abuse. For instance, unconscious biases may mean that people do not view professionals working at schools or churches as having the potential to abuse (Arnold & Jeglic, 2024). This can lead to a failure in identifying and responding to institutional abuse. Therefore, the SIM highlights the importance of the individual being situated within different contexts, all of which will either mitigate or intensify individual experiences of traumatic stress and subsequent healing.

As explored in both models, powerlessness is a common experience for survivors. In fact this dynamic has been found to be the best predictor of anxiety and depression within the TDM (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that power can be a motivating factor for perpetrators of sexual abuse, as well as being implicated in the mental health outcomes of survivors. In the former instance, power is defined as the ability to control others through persuasion, coercion or authority (Turner, 2005). Those with less power may experience more vulnerability and dependence on others (Gravelin et al., 2019; Keltner et al., 2003). This is often the case for survivors during the sexual abuse where the perpetrator is often someone they know with power, whether this is a religious leader (De Weger & Death, 2017), family or a family friend (Hassan et al., 2015). Due to these dynamics, survivors can go onto experience power imbalances in various areas of their lives such as within romantic relationships or when interacting with healthcare workers (Maltas, 1996; Montgomery, 2013). For example, pregnant sexual abuse survivors having vaginal examinations done by healthcare workers can lead to reliving traumatic memories (due to the sexual abuse involving vaginal penetration; Montgomery et al., 2015). These examinations were unavoidable, however, survivors felt that

they would cope with the trauma symptoms if they trusted those performing the examinations and they were offered some sense of control.

Following on from the two models and the idea of developing a sense of control after sexual abuse, survivors may use various methods to manage the difficulties they experience. This can include spirituality, relaxation techniques, therapeutic support and engaging in social activism (Stockman et al., 2023). However, many survivors engage in self-injurious behaviours (such as suicide attempts, risky sex behaviours, cutting or drug and alcohol use/abuse). These behaviours can be interpreted as sexual abuse survivors attempting to regain control over their body to combat the powerlessness referred to in the TDM (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012) and SIM (Scoglio et al., 2022). Self-injurious behaviours can also be attempts to suppress trauma memories or to self-punish (Chapman et al., 2006; Favazza, 1996; Kapur et al., 2013). Finally, during traumatic abuse individuals dissociate from bodily sensations, which can manifest itself in self-injurious behaviours such as cutting to regulate the self out of this state (Panzer & Viljoen, 2004). Although such coping strategies can offer a temporary relief or a sense of control for sexual abuse survivors, they can cause further physical and psychological harm to the individual in the long-term.

Sexual abuse disclosure

Due to shame and guilt associated with humiliating or sexually violent traumas, sexual abuse survivors may engage in interpersonal avoidance (Maercker & Horn, 2013). Social responses can be a major factor in determining disclosure of sexual abuse, alongside the impact severity for survivors as explored earlier in the TDM and SIM. Disclosure of sexual abuse often refers to telling another individual formally (such as police interviews) or informally (such as telling family or friends) about the sexual abuse, typically for the first time (Ullman, 2002). Whether disclosure occurs soon after sexual abuse or later on in life depends on many factors, such as the support available and the level of shame or guilt individuals feel about being a

survivor (Brattfjell & Flåm, 2019; Jay et al., 2022; Tener & Murphy, 2015). Moreover, disclosure is often described as the start of the healing process (Jeong & Cha, 2019).

Literature suggests that there can be benefits to disclosing a "concealable stigmatised identity" as it can lead to greater social support, fewer psychological difficulties and developing a sense of hope and trust in healthy relationships (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Winters et al., 2020). Sexual abuse survivors in the research by Kirkner et al. (2021) recommended disclosing to people that are safe, supportive and have some level of training or personal experience with sexual abuse. However, the manner of response to disclosure (such as blaming and doubting versus offering emotional support) has been found to be as important as the practical support offered (Ahrens et al., 2007; Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Sexual abuse survivors pre-emptively consider social rejection after disclosure, since publicly changing information about their identity can impact perceptions of those in their immediate or wider social circle. This is noted particularly in survivors from religious or racialised communities (including Christian institutions or Black or South Asian communities). There is often a fear of social ostracism, or the family reputation is prioritised over the needs of a survivor, alongside a lack of trust that formal institutions will offer support (Rodger et al., 2020). Sexual abuse can become an "open secret" if people know that it happens but demonstrate little acknowledgement or action to address this. Communities or families that are more likely to respond negatively to disclosure can create barriers for survivors, as these individuals may hold the fear of not knowing where to receive support (Hurcombe et al., 2019). This is also observed in gender differences between sexual abuse survivors. The majority of research and public discussions revolve around female survivors (Melville et al., 2019; Munro-Kramer et al., 2017). More specifically, male survivors are more reluctant to disclose sexual abuse (London et al., 2008). One reason for this can be due to myths such as male survivors cannot be raped, they enjoy sexual acts and they are homosexual (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Godier-McBard & Jones, 2020). Hence, sexual

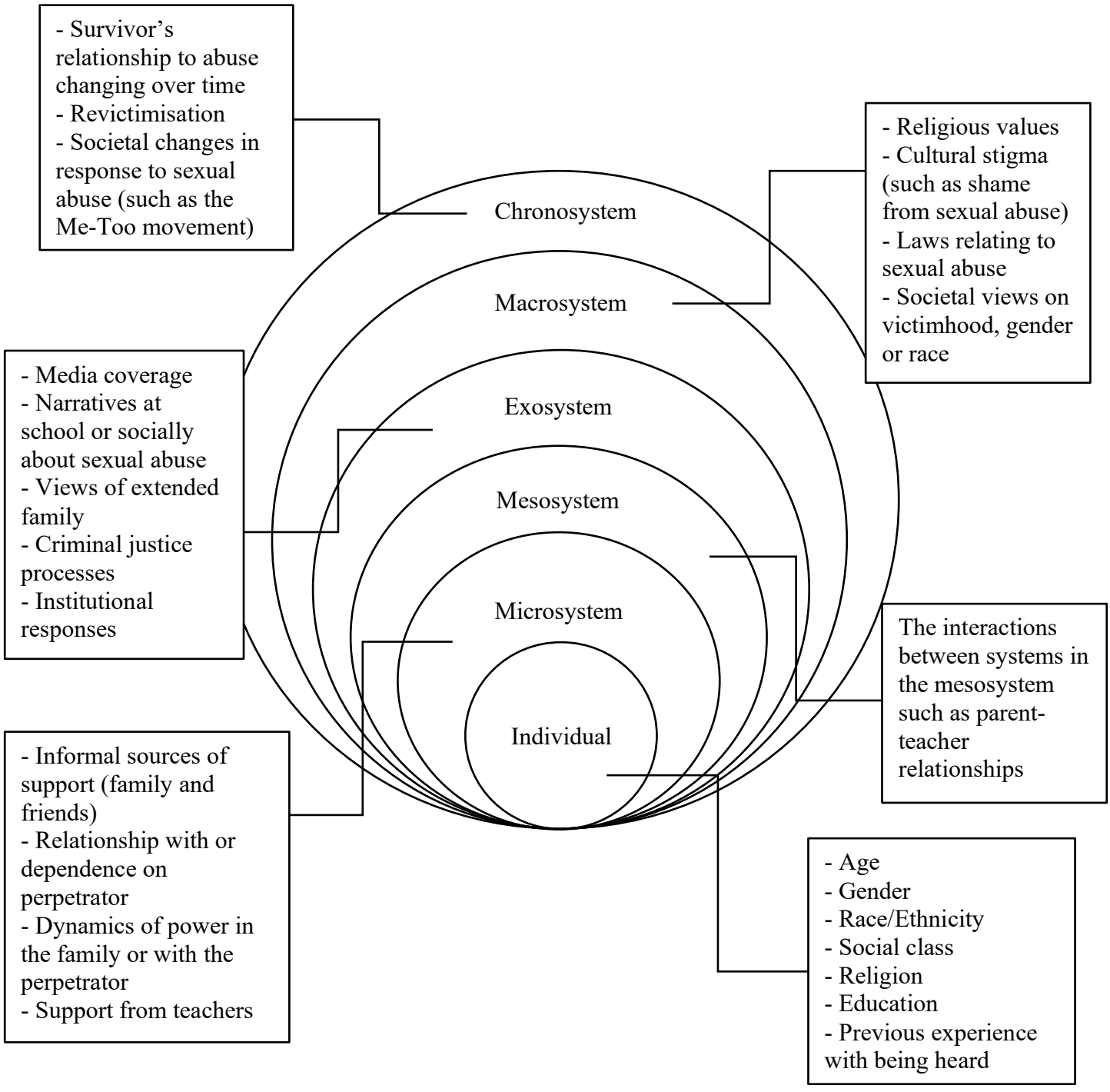
abuse survivors may choose to stay silent or disclose their experiences online via anonymous accounts. This can offer security against personally aggressive responses they may receive if their identities were public (Andalibi & Forte, 2018).

Additionally, research has found individual differences that may explain the impact of sexual abuse disclosure on survivors. The Ecological Systems Model (ESM) is a widely used model outlining ways that extended systems (such as the family and social environment) and one's relationship with each system over time effects individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; see Figure 1). Individual development refers to how an individual changes over time (psychologically, socially, emotionally or physically) as they interact with the systems around them. At the individual level, characteristics or previous experiences of the sexual abuse survivor can impact the ways they interact with the rest of the systems, including prior attempts to seek help, race and gender. There are five interconnected systems that effect an individual (Zinzow et al., 2022): the microsystem (immediate environment that directly impacts an individual), mesosystem (a connection between microsystems), exosystem (external systems that indirectly impact the individual), macrosystem (shared cultural or societal values and norms) and chronosystem (experiences that reflect changes in the individual and their environment over time). Linking the ESM to the disclosure process in childhood sexual abuse, when family life (in the microsystem) facilitates space for the child to openly express themselves, this can be a facilitator for exposing sexual abuse (Tat & Ozturk, 2019). As a perpetrator of child sexual abuse is often a person that that child knows, having this safe and trusted person within the micro-, meso- or exo-system is essential for early disclosure (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015). When thinking about adult survivors, Zinzow et al. (2022) found that literature around the ESM can explain the barriers for disclosure, specifically when there is a fear of a lack of support and shame from those in the microsystem. The researchers highlighted

that this fear was heightened when there were power dynamics in play such as the perpetrator being an employer or financially supporting the survivor.

Figure 1

Adaptation of The Ecological Systems Model of influences on disclosure of Sexual Abuse



Note. The original model was produced by Bronfenbrenner (1976) and further adapted to consider barriers to formal help-seeking by Zinzow et al. (2022). The current version has been developed using both versions and the researcher's own knowledge from the literature.

Based on insights on individual development gained from the ESM, a systematic meta-review found that sexual abuse survivors were influenced by multiple ecological levels (Stockman et al., 2023). Findings highlighted significant associations between the chronosystem (which involved time since the sexual abuse), the meso- and micro-system (including the presence or absence of a support network around them and the survivor's perception of the support offered). The review found that being faced with blaming social responses and disbelief led to greater reliance on avoidance coping mechanisms (such as sexual avoidance and substance use). This aligns with the findings from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The IICSA found that receiving negative responses after disclosing sexual abuse, often disbelief of survivors (such as shame and being called a liar) intensified their trauma (Jay et al., 2022). The responses to their disclosures meant that the survivors never wanted to talk about the sexual abuse again. These findings reiterate the importance of having supportive social networks, especially during disclosure, in order to promote healing for sexual abuse survivors.

Speaking out publicly

Whilst an initial disclosure tends to be discreet and a pivotal point in a sexual abuse survivors' journey, for some this evolves into speaking out publicly about their issue one or more times. This transforms their personal testimony or disclosure to family, friends or legal professionals into a goal to raise awareness and make social change.

Sexual abuse survivors can choose to speak out using many domains, including public inquiries, press interviews or aid research in understanding best ways to support the needs of survivors (Allnock et al., n.d.). They may also choose to speak out using non-verbal mediums such as blogs, social media or books (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Pritchard & Sainsbury, 2004, p.41; Watanabe et al., 2023). Despite potentially receiving negative public responses, those that do speak out can be a source of support for other survivors by helping them feel understood,

lifting the burden of shame around sexual abuse and empowering them to regain power over the sexual abuse (Ligiero, 2023; PCAR, n.d.; Stidham et al., 2012). As survivors find their way through their healing journey, the ability to choose the medium (speech vs non-verbal) and level of anonymity when speaking out is crucial in regaining a sense of agency and control: both of which are taken away from an individual due to the abuse (Delker et al., 2020).

A further distinction between disclosure and speaking out publicly about sexual abuse is where along their healing journey a survivor is. In other words, it is argued that disclosure is the earliest form of speaking out, and individuals at this stage are earlier on in their healing path. On the other hand, survivors who continually speak out about sexual abuse or engage in advocacy work are somewhat further along their healing journey; as they needed healing from their experiences before they actively engaged in helping others (Stidham et al., 2012). Thus, these individuals aim to share their realisations from their journeys (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Discourse is that one can experience growth and distress at once after significant adversity (Hartley et al., 2016), conveying the non-linear and an ongoing nature of healing (Banyard & Williams, 2007). Furthermore, making sense of the sexual abuse, finding adaptive ways to manage the negative impact, and working on healthy relationships with others are elements of healing (Draucker et al., 2011; Hartley et al., 2016; Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020). Whilst sharing their stories allows survivors to help others with similar experiences, it can also contribute to their own healing journey too. Literature highlights that speaking out encourages survivors to develop adaptive coping strategies, attribute blame externally instead of the self and gain support from the wider community (Domhardt et al., 2015; Jeong & Cha, 2019).

Sexual abuse has been an area of particular interest in the press due to celebrity names being perpetrators in scandals, such as the institutional cover-up of Jimmy Savile's sexual offences for years (Greer & McLaughlin, 2013). Within this evolving media coverage, sexual

abuse survivors have been speaking to the media for many years in an effort to share their experiences, advance public perception and influence policymakers (Weatherred, 2015).

Trauma survivors speaking to journalists

When shifting from making personal disclosures to speaking out about sexual abuse publicly, the media can be vital in having the survivor voices heard. Research to date has focused on the impact of reporting traumatic events on journalists such as depression, experiencing flashbacks, substance abuse and guilt (Feinstein et al., 2014; Seely, 2019). As such, the need for journalistic training on approaching trauma survivors for the wellbeing of these professionals has become apparent (Bradley and Heywood, 2024 p.224; Seely, 2020). Regarding the effects of journalistic encounters on survivors, literature has mostly accounted for trauma from terrorist attacks or traffic fatalities, as opposed to sexual abuse, which will be explored further.

Journalistic encounters are very distinct from types of informal support (family and friends) and even, other types of formal support (including the police or lawyers). For example, reports to the police, lawyers or therapists do not necessarily lead to a story being public whilst this is more likely to be the case after talking to a journalist (Newman & Shapiro, 2014). Ultimately, journalists are "professional storytellers" (Dworznik, 2006) who are tasked with making sense of events and retelling the stories of those events (Dworznik-Hoak, 2020). Since publicly sharing their personal stories can have negative repercussions for trauma survivors, journalists must evaluate the benefits and limitations of reporting on such events. Speaking out publicly can benefit an individual's healing journey, reframe narratives around trauma and help others (Gueta et al., 2020), similar to when disclosure occurs privately.

Elaborating on the impact of interviews on trauma survivors, journalists must be willing to address a potential power imbalance arising during initial interactions and subsequent media coverage of stories. For example, factors such as choice of words within questions, journalist

characteristics, journalistic distancing, quotes or images used in published stories and the overall way in which a story is presented to the public, can all impact survivor experiences of speaking out (Deinyan, n.d.; Healey, 2020). Cherry (2021) interviewed survivors of homicide and traffic fatalities, and journalists, from Canada and the United States of America. Most of the trauma survivors reported their first encounters with the media as negative including resurfacing of their trauma due to retelling their story. This has a negative long-term impact on survivors due to an invasion of their privacy and unexpectedly seeing upsetting graphic images of their loved ones on the news.

However, previous research has been found that sexual abuse survivors do not benefit from telling their stories in the same ways as survivors of less stigmatising traumas such as natural disasters (Delker et al., 2020). This is largely due to audience members being less receptive to stories of sexual abuse. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how sexual abuse survivors experience speaking to journalists. The study by Foster and Minwalla (2018) with displaced Yazidi women found that those who were interviewed by journalists about ISIS sexual violence often experienced emotional pain when retelling their stories. This resulted in flashbacks, fatigue and crying. Considering previous research on how audiences may view sexual abuse stories, this suggests that sexual abuse survivors may face unique challenges and disproportionate consequences when speaking out to journalists.

Finally, trauma survivors and traumatised bereaved people have reported feeling violated when their (or their deceased loved ones') stories were published incorrectly (Forsberg, 2019; Maercker & Mehr, 2006), and memories of the event resurfaced when journalists requested interviews repeatedly and asked for details of the event (Glad et al., 2017; Walsh-Chiders et al., 2011). The research clearly demonstrates the need for a sensitive approach from journalists to tackle the potential stigma, powerlessness and negative self-views of themselves and the world, that can otherwise be reinforced for trauma survivors. Trauma

survivors and grieving relatives noticed that although individual journalists were not sensitive at times, there were organisational factors (such as getting as much coverage as possible on traumatic events) that were beyond journalist control (Forsberg, 2019; Walsh-Childers et al., 2011). In all of the research referred to above, the trauma survivors still referred to their positive experiences such as the genuine concern felt by the journalists, having the opportunity to share personal stories and their own motivation to raise awareness. They saw their negative experiences as the exception rather than the rule for all journalistic encounters (Walsh-Childers et al., 2011). This highlights the drive survivors have to reclaim their narrative and advocate for other survivors that may not be heard otherwise, despite difficulties associated with speaking to journalists.

Journalism

Journalism is not a homogenous practice and the type of media outlet that sexual abuse survivors engage with journalists in can influence the ways in which their stories are portrayed. In the UK, newspapers are often distinguished by their style, mostly the divide between broadsheets and tabloids. This can reflect audience expectations, financial pressures, technological advances, newsroom culture, editorial priorities and news values (Cottle, 2003; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Broadsheet newspapers are associated with in-depth reporting that is analytical, uses neutral wording and appealing to professional audiences (Järvbäck Hillbom, 2004; Hanusch, 2013). On the contrary, popular tabloid newspapers can prioritise the speed at which stories are published, visual drama and sensational storytelling (Alba-Juez, 2017). Social media has shifted news reporting, with user-generated and popular culture-oriented content being shared more by consumers, as opposed to the emphasis on 'hard news' in traditional media such as politics and crime (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). This highlights the tension between how news is represented on traditional outlets and social media, impacting journalism and the way stories are published on different platforms. It suggests that media output cannot be

attributed to the decisions of an individual journalist but is shaped by broader societal and technological shifts.

Due to differences in how stories are portrayed across different newspaper types, clearly defined news values are essential for making fast editorial decisions such as when to drop one story over a more relevant story (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016). For sexual abuse survivors, sensationalised reporting can distort their story and having their stories dropped at the last minute can lead to survivors feeling devalued (Soliman, 2020). Additionally, the newsroom has historically been impacted by "macho culture" that focuses on competitiveness and scrutinising approaches to journalism (Allan, 2010; Steiner, 2017). This approach disadvantages female journalists through unpredictable hours and being assigned 'soft news' (e.g. lifestyle or entertainment stories that are not urgent) as opposed to 'hard news' (e.g. time-sensitive events that affect society). This culture also prioritises conflict, sensationalism and dramatic impact, whereas more nuanced or complex narratives such as stories of sexual abuse survivors may be simplified or reshaped to conform to the newsroom values (Allan, 2010; Steiner, 2017). Therefore, "macho culture" does not only impact those who tell stories (e.g. journalists) but influence how stories are told and which voices are prioritised.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) was developed to encourage media accountability for the print media in the UK (Middleton, 2017). IPSO aims to monitor compliance and investigate complaints through corrections, apologies and sometimes fines. There are codes of practice made available to the public to highlight the regulatory framework they use, including not identifying and taking care when working with sexual abuse survivors and social media guidance (IPSO, 2025). However, the growing discourse around IPSO's failure to make meaningful action in some cases may deter the public from reporting bad practice (HackedOff, 2024).

Trauma-Informed Journalism

In other areas of life where survivors speak about sexual abuse, the ways that they are approached and narratives they encounter can influence their experience of speaking out further or accessing relevant services. Healthcare, education and legal systems have gradually been adopting a Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA) in order to understand how trauma can affect the psychological and social development of an individual (Sweeney et al., 2016). This involves viewing individual struggles and coping strategies through a trauma lens, making organisational changes to avoid retraumatisation and prioritising the trust between the individual and service-provider (Reeves, 2015). More specifically, TIA is based on six principles: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural competence (Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2022; Sweeney & Taggart, 2018).

As examined previously, trauma survivors' lives can be shaped by the impact of trauma based on the schemas, social relationships, internal world and coping strategies they have developed. This can mirror what happens when services are organised around the severe stress created from trying to cope with a flawed system (Bloom, 2006). Therefore, when survivors initially feel unsafe and the service is unable to support them, survivors can withdraw from the services. A TIA can relieve these anxieties by encouraging service-providers to view struggles through the lens of 'what happened to you?', rather than 'what is wrong with you?' (Harris & Fallot, 2001). This creates hope, healing and empowerment by reframing complex behaviours as having a function during survival, whilst focusing on strength-based understanding of behaviours (Sweeney & Taggart, 2018). TIA echo Herman's (2002) three-phase recovery model which focuses on the importance of establishing safety prior to processing the disruptions in integration and the coping strategies used. This is unsurprising given that establishing safety ensures that survivors can speak out about the abuse without fear of negative social consequences.

A critique of TIA has been that it can overlook key emotional experiences, specifically shame, which is viewed by some as the "master emotion" (Scheff, 2004). Shame has intrapersonal effects (such as low self-esteem and negative self-perception) and interpersonal consequences (such as distrust in relationships, mistreatment and social rejection; Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). Chronic shame can be invisible as individuals may adopt coping strategies to mask or manage the pain of shame such as substance misuse or social withdrawal (Chapman et al., 2006; Maercker & Hecker, 2016; Trickett & McBride-Change, 1995). Although shame is a natural human emotion, the experience of shame can be intensified in the aftermath of trauma, particularly surrounding self-blame for the traumatic event occurring (MacGinley et al., 2019). Dolezal and Gibson (2022) argue that systems working with trauma survivors should recognise and understand shame and respond to the ways it can manifest (alongside trauma). Alongside this, they suggest that professionals working within these systems should be aware of shame within themselves by understanding how shame can impact their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and attitudes towards others.

A TIA can be applied to systems beyond healthcare or therapy as long as they aim to create spaces that establish safety (Sweeney and Taggart, 2018). Trauma-Informed Journalism (TIJ) has been one such area that has adopted a TIA and evolved to mitigate harm to interviewees during the journalistic processes of newsgathering, production and dissemination. TIJ involves understanding the ways trauma impacts an individual, the ways a journalist approaches them (such as immediately after the traumatic event or a few months later) and the complexities around informed consent (Miller, 2022).

The hierarchy of power within these relationships can result in journalists and media organisations inappropriately asserting power onto interviewees (Bowers et al., 2004), thereby reducing the level of control individuals have over how their experiences are publicised. This imbalance of power and ultimately control can undermine the trust needed to share one's story,

especially when journalists can sensationalise stories about trauma. Typical methods of interviewing are beneficial when interviewing people in power, however, this technique can seem insensitive when interviewing survivors of trauma (Newman et al., 2023). News sources, such as trauma survivors or grieving relatives, are often unaware of the editorial and organisational structures that shape how their information or stories are used (Forsberg, 2019). Informed consent is related to journalists informing trauma survivors about the nature of the story and informing them about exactly how their story will be used. Due to this it can come as a shock when they are faced with sensationalised versions or graphic pictures surrounding their trauma (Cherry, 2023). Therefore, trauma-informed principles (developing trust, offering a sense of control and building rapport) can address this uncertainty and offer survivors more opportunities to share their stories (Foot, 2019).

Organisations such as the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP; Quigley, 2023), National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC, n.d.), Pickup Communications (Cherry, n.d.) and Samaritans (2020) have developed TIJ toolkits for journalists. The guidelines highlight the need for journalists to take a collaborative stance, be flexible in their approach, offer empathy, avoid graphic details and stay in touch with survivors after the interviews. Understanding that journalists need quick access to trauma-related terms and themes (including definitions of sexual violence and PTSD), the Dart Center created a comprehensive document that they can consult when writing or reporting on their interviews (Thompson, 2021). Acquiring such tools could encourage journalists to connect more with trauma survivors, write articles that are in line with the survivor's story and consider their own wellbeing during the process (Bradley & Heywood, 2024 p. 191; Foot, 2024). Additionally, there are tips for trauma survivors who are thinking of speaking out to journalists. They include empowering survivors to reject an interview if they are not comfortable and informing them of the benefits and negative consequences of speaking to the media (Cherry, 2025).

Growing literature surrounding journalist reports on trauma highlights a desire to integrate TIJ into the journalism curriculum. Therefore, journalists in training would have opportunities to include and practice TIJ in their interviewing methods, and a step could be taken to destigmatise mental health discussions within this group (Ogunyemi and Price, 2023a; Wake et al., 2023). Although journalism educators globally are motivated to teach trauma, there are barriers to achieving this including: trauma education not being a priority for the course, difficulties in implementing actor-based simulations for assignments, lack of reading materials available on trauma and limited input from mental health professionals to inform the use of TIJ during training (Ogunyemi and Price, 2023b). This was due to a lack of institutional guidelines for TIJ. Additionally, journalists have reported feeling better equipped to manage (survivor's and their own) emotional distress and conduct interviews with respect and appropriate language when offered trauma-informed education (Maxson, 2000; Seely, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that TIJ must become a core competency in journalism education.

Due to the limited literature in the area, the next section presents a meta-ethnography summarising the experiences of trauma survivors when speaking out publicly to aid our understanding of their reasons for speaking out and how retelling their story impacts them.

Systematic Literature Review

Background and Aims

Roughly 70% of people globally will have a potentially traumatic experience throughout their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2024). Aside from accessing therapeutic support, it is suggested that individuals continue their normal daily routines and talk to trusted people about the experience as soon as they feel ready to (World Health Organization, 2024).

As explored previously, the ESM (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) and SIM (Maercker & Horn, 2013) highlight the interactions between various systems surrounding an individual and the

impact on development. The SIM starts with the social affective responses including shame, moves onto the support network around them, and gradually expands to cultural and societal influences that contribute to the individual trauma experiences. Moreover, the SIM can aid our understanding of the way individuals may be impacted by their environment, as well as the additional impact of trauma on their perception of social responses or support available. Although trauma survivors do speak out about their traumatic experiences, whether that is socially, therapeutically or in public contexts (Gueta et al., 2020; Parry & Simpson, 2016), the perspectives of trauma survivors on speaking out publicly has not been investigated systematically using a meta-ethnographic synthesis.

As explored earlier, trauma survivors, such as survivors of traffic fatalities, natural disasters, and grieving relatives have been researched in relation to speaking out to journalists (Cherry, 2021; Forsberg, 2019). This is hardly the case for sexual abuse survivors. Sexual abuse is distinct from other types of abuse in that it involves an intimate violation of one's personal boundaries (usually by someone the person trusts). Thus, it is reasonable to argue that internal (such as blaming oneself and shame) and interpersonal (such as social rejection and not being believed) manifestations of trauma in sexual abuse and the support available are impacted heavily by societal perceptions (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012; Godier-McBard & Jones, 2020; Hurcombe et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2020). In contrast, such stigma is unlikely to emerge from other types of traumatic events, for instance, road traffic accidents or robberies. Therefore, although it would be ideal to focus on the experiences of sexual abuse survivors speaking out to journalists in this meta ethnography, a lack of research within this area means that focus will be given on the experiences of all forms of trauma survivors speaking out publicly. This will be relevant to the overarching thesis since it will offer more knowledge around the experiences of trauma survivors speaking out publicly. Specifically, this will provide a deeper insight into the needs or motivations of trauma survivors when speaking out.

This meta-ethnography adopted a broad approach to account for as many studies on speaking out about traumatic experiences as possible. Firstly, focus was given on research exploring trauma survivors speaking out using both verbal and non-verbal domains (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Allnock et al., n.d.; Watanabe et al., 2023). Secondly, as outlined earlier, journalistic encounters are distinct for trauma survivors as opposed to other contexts where they share their stories. The main reason for this is that one's story can become public and attract negative responses from the audience. Therefore, this meta-ethnography focused on speaking out in public contexts in general due to the close links with speaking out to journalists.

Overall, this meta-ethnography aimed to systematically investigate and synthesise reasons why trauma survivors spoke out publicly about personal traumatic events, and their experience of the benefits and barriers associated with this.

Methods

Search strategy

Search terms were identified by reading relevant papers and the researcher's clinical knowledge of the general discourse about survivors of traumatic events. A systematic search was conducted using EBSCOhost on the following databases: CINAHL, PsycINFO and Medline. This was searched on the 28th of November 2024 and last updated on the 20th of December 2024. The full search strategy and the number of results yielded by each search is available in Table 1. This yielded 216 results after limiting to papers that were in English and had the search terms present in the title. As this presented a mixture of quantitative and qualitative papers, it was decided that an additional search for qualitative research would be included. 77 papers remained after qualitative research was selected. There were 49 papers remaining after duplicates were removed. The full-text versions of the 49 papers were analysed individually in order to match them to the inclusion criteria, which yielded five papers. A

manual search of potentially relevant papers was also conducted and three papers were selected to be analysed. Full details of the search and screening process can be seen in Figure 2.

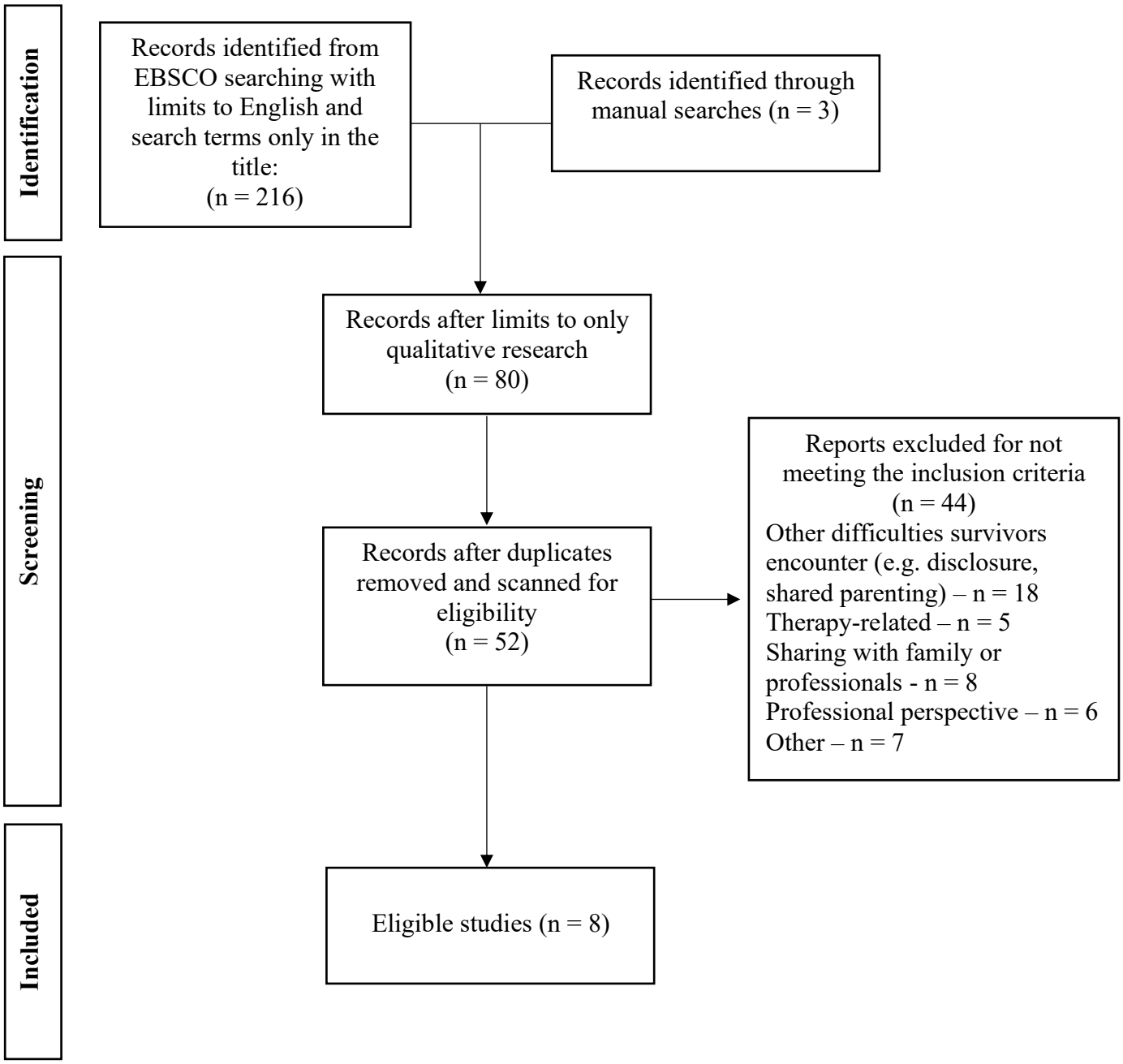
Table 1.

Search strategy used in EBSCO host on 20th December 2024.

Databases: Medline, CINAHL, PsycINFO	
Search terms	Results
(1) Survivor* or victim* or sufferer*	481,032
(2) Reveal* OR Shar* OR "Speak* out" or talk* or communicat* or "public speak*" or "public speech*"	6,447552
(3) abuse or "sexual abuse" or assault or violence or "sexual violence" or "natural disaster*" or "single-event trauma" or "trauma* event" or crime	1,048,333
(4) 1 + 2 + 3	25,365
(5) TI (1 + 2 + 3) AND Only English Language	216
(6) “qualitative research” or “qualitative study” or “qualitative methods” or interview or qualitative	1,713,017
(7) 5 + 6	77
(8) All duplicates removed	49

Figure 2.

Flow diagram for study selection



Screening and Selection

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: a) the research explored the first-hand experiences of trauma survivors speaking out about their story publicly (in person or online and anonymous or not) b) the studies interviewed trauma survivors directly c) they were available in English d) they were published in peer-reviewed journals to ensure they were of high quality. Where research included references to healing (outside of speaking out), speaking to family, criminal justice system or healthcare professionals, the analysis focused on parts of the data that was relevant to the inclusion criteria.

The exclusion criteria included: a) studies that explored trauma survivors speaking to or disclosing trauma in specialist settings such as the criminal justice system, medical or social care sector b) studies that explored trauma survivors speaking about their story or disclosing to family or friends c) studies that explored the perspectives of healthcare professionals and not trauma survivor directly d) studies that used quantitative methods. Thus, the exclusion criteria applied predominately to literature on interactions with family, friends and healthcare professionals referencing a sense of confidentiality and discreetness to the interactions, in contrast to speaking out publicly.

Synthesis

Meta-ethnography was used to synthesise the findings of qualitative studies. This is a qualitative research method aiming to offer new insights by developing theories of human experience. The seven phases outlined by Noblit & Hare (1988) informed this synthesis which aimed to interpret and translate findings across studies. These phases involved devising specific research questions, identifying relevant studies, reading the studies, determining how the studies are related to one another, translating the studies into one another, synthetising translations and finally expressing the synthesis.

Reading the studies (phase three) involved identifying the main research characteristics, including study design and sample characteristics. Additionally, the researcher reminded themselves about the aims of the meta-ethnography since all of the papers had different methodologies and aims. When categorising the findings from each paper, the researcher utilised first-order interpretations (quotations from participants when available) and second-order interpretations (the author's interpretations) which aided the determination of how the studies were related to one another (phase four).

When translating the studies into one another (phase five), the researcher initially read two papers in no particular order. The synthesis from those two papers were then compared with the each of the following papers. Preliminary categories were determined using earlier papers the researcher read whilst being aware that they could be adapted based on new concepts from the further papers read. The researcher was aware of translating the similarities and differences between the interpretations of each study, this included identifying shared themes, metaphors or concepts across studies. For phases six and seven, the findings were then translated into "more than the parts alone" (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This involved creating a deeper understanding of the data that goes beyond the findings of the individual studies, leading to the development of a line of argument synthesis. The line of argument synthesis aims to make the overlaps in ideas across the literature easier to identify for audiences and could be represented visually using a diagram. The categories and the line of synthesis will be explored further in the results section below.

Results

Table 2 summarises the main characteristics of each included study.

Study design

Thematic analysis was used by four studies. From these studies, one of them used a focus group approach to data collection (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024), one used a mix

of survey responses and follow up interviews (Barker et al., 2023) whilst the other two used semi-structured interviews (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Campbell et al., 2023). Two of the studies used qualitative content analysis (Taylor, 2002; Yang, 2024).

Campbell et al. (2010) and Aroussi (2020) both used specific methodology in their research. Campbell et al. (2010) used a four-phase process which included: open coding and identifying initial themes; analysing at multiple levels and identifying patterns in the data; constructing interpretations then comparing these against the data available and the primary research questions, and finally verification of findings via consultation with multiple practitioners. This enabled a systematic qualitative analysis approach by using grounded theory, thematic analysis and qualitative verification strategies. The researchers made use of multiple coders which minimised researcher bias and increased the reliability of their analyses. Thus, findings were as accurate reflections of the lived experiences of the participants as possible.

Aroussi (2020) used narrative methods in their interviews. Stories from the participants were supported throughout the study by meta-research, which is commonly used in studies on gender-based violence. Meta-research enabled the researcher to continuously assess the methodology and how they were interacting with participants in an attempt to consider the impact of the research process on participants. The researcher did this by asking participants how they felt speaking about their experiences after each participant interview.

Quality appraisal

The studies were subject to the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP; 2018) checklist for Qualitative Research. There is ongoing debate around the application of quality assessments to qualitative research (Atkins et al., 2008). As such, there is no consensus about when a study should be excluded due to its quality. All of the studies screened against the inclusion criteria were nevertheless of high quality based on their CASP scores. Therefore, the

CASP tool was used to aid detailed reading and understanding of the aims, methods, results, and limitations of the studies (see Appendix 1). It is acknowledged that five of the studies used differing qualitative methodologies. However, having varied qualitative analyses can open up opportunities to explore new elements relevant to the research question.

Table 2.
Main characteristics of the included studies

Author and Year	Country	Participants	Gender	Ethnicity	Age Range	Who were they speaking out to?	Main Findings
Taylor (2002)	USA	21 survivors of intimate partner violence	Female	African American	20-70 (mean age of 39)	Researchers	Participating in research to start healing the self, speak on behalf of those who cannot speak out and emergence of new insights.
Campbell et al. (2010)	USA	92 rape survivors	Female	50% African American; 37% White	Average age 34.79	Researchers	Participating contributed to new insights and interpretations of their experience and healing journey. They found the experience supportive.
Aroussi (2020)	East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo	76 survivors of sexual violence	Female	Unknown	Unknown	Researchers	Participating to help others and develop new insights and interpretations of their own experience. They felt valued and respected.
Hamber and Lundy (2020)	Northern Ireland	43 survivors of child sexual abuse	18/43 Female	Unknown	Mean age 56 (female) and 65 (male)	Confidential forum to share their experiences of the public inquiry	Participants wanted justice for others, the setting of the inquiry impacted speaking out and not feeling able to speak freely about their experience.

Campbell et al. (2023)	USA	32 survivors of sexual assault	Female	87.5% African American/ Black; 9.14% White	25-60	Researchers	A need to help survivors, contribute to and improve sciences by promoting change. Some participants had reservations about the privacy of the data.
Barker et al. (2023)	UK	Survey completed by 73 survivors of child sexual abuse	58/73 Female	78.79% White/ British	56-65 (33.3%)	Counsellors and support workers offering a TIA to the public inquiry	Participants felt empowerment and a sense of control. They felt believed, leading to healing. Some were retraumatised due retelling abuse.
Kirchner and Niederkrotenthaler (2024)	USA	12 participants impacted by suicide	5/12 Female	Unknown	Unknown	Public talks	Speaking out to help others through their own story. Felt a sense of validation and gained new insights into their own story after sharing.
Yang (2024)	China	15 survivors of a flood	9/15 Female	Chinese	21-30	Speaking out publicly within their community	Speaking out offered reaffirmation of their identity post-trauma and developed their communal bonds.

Synthesis

Theme 1: Contributing to the public understanding of trauma

This theme relates to the idea that trauma survivors speak out about their stories due to wanting to develop other people's understanding of their experiences, and to (directly or indirectly) support those who cannot do this.

One study highlighted the disparities between a survivor's sense of identity and how outsiders viewed their experience. For example, flood survivors may "perceive themselves as victims" whilst outsiders may see them as being "lucky and have not suffered as much" (Yang, 2024, p. 743). These individuals found it beneficial for their identity and the community when they shared their survivor identities with others. Two different studies found that speaking out about their story in research settings was important for survivors of sexual assault (Campbell et al., 2023; Taylor, 2002) for two reasons. Firstly, individuals believed that the right people could hear their stories to "understand what happened in order to build…a better program". Secondly, the research could possibly lead to training the police on "how to deal with rape victims and rape kits" (Campbell et al., 2023, p. 58). Moreover, rape survivors who participated in research referred to the interview making them conscious about services that needed to be available for survivors, especially since they were concerned that not all survivors would be able to manage "emotionally or psychologically" as they did without the support (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 71). Another medium for survivors to share their stories was during public talks. A survivor who shared their story in a public talk referred to feeling hopeful that audience members were more likely to support others in need by saying "he has hopefully learned, now he's gonna teach his guys… maybe help save somebody's life" (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024, p. 7). Finally, two of the studies (Taylor, 2002; Yang, 2024) had a specific focus on the importance of speaking out benefiting their community or the bonds within their community. Survivors strengthened their "communal identity" and bond by

sharing their experiences and identities with others in their community (Yang, 2024, p. 742) which "fostered feelings of social responsibility that supported their efforts to speak out" (Taylor, 2002, p. 154). The examples of speaking out documented in research reflects a motivation to highlight resources needed by trauma survivors. Educating the public and those in power helps ensure that survivors who are not speaking out and future survivors have access to better support and fewer struggles.

With regards to advocating for others that have experienced similar traumatic events, at least four studies identified that this was the main motivator for trauma survivors speaking out (Aroussi, 2020; Campbell et al., 2023; Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024). More specifically, survivors wanted to speak out about their experiences because it could "bring the voices and plight of women from this area" (Aroussi, 2020, p. 589) and "let that person know it's not your fault. It's going to be okay" (Campbell et al., 2023, p. 57-58). Some individuals also referred to speaking out about injustice in order to be a voice to those who were not present during the research or had passed away (Aroussi, 2020; Hamber & Lundy, 2020). Alongside being a voice for others, individuals impacted by suicide wanted to provide hope by showing that "you can change your relationship to your own suicidal thoughts" (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024, p. 4). The feedback survivors received from audience members confirmed this motivation of hope as "it helped them [the audience] see that it could be different for them" (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024, p. 7). Overall, speaking out plays an important role in offering other trauma survivors validation and emotional strength, ultimately contributing to their healing journey.

Theme 2: Furthering the personal healing journey

This theme explores the idea that sharing one's trauma can contribute to an individual's healing journey in various ways.

Three of the studies described the importance of needing to be heard (Aroussi, 2024; Barker et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2010). There were references to being listened to with patience and without being mocked, allowing survivors to talk and cry freely which got "it out of [their] system" (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 70). Having a sympathetic ear listening to their story provided survivors, who were "ostracised by their communities" (Aroussi, 2024, p. 587), the hope that things will get better for raped women. This was even more meaningful given that the survivors mentioned how other people may try to "block out what they don't want to deal with…because they can't handle it" (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 70), or not take their abuse seriously (Barker et al., 2023). Being heard was referred to as empowering for survivors across all of these studies and contributing to their healing process, especially when they did not have to constantly repeat their story. In the words of one survivor, they felt like "a person and not just another victim" (Barker et al., 2023, p. 6).

Furthermore, survivors often felt a "sense of belonging and feelings of validation, satisfaction, and reinforcement" when sharing their stories, thereby motivating them to share a "different narrative: one of struggle…and one of hope" (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024, p. 4). Individuals also tended to discover new parts of their stories or coping strategies the more they spoke out about their experiences (Barker et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2010; Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024; Yang, 2024). Thus, speaking out led to a "reawakening" of their own vulnerabilities which allowed survivors to not be as hard on themselves (Campbell et al., 2010, p. 71). In sum, this theme conveys that speaking out started the healing journeys of survivors by allowing them to hear themselves and make their experiences feel real; a perspective also expressed by individuals that spoke out in research by Taylor (2002).

Theme 3: Facilitators to speaking out comfortably

This theme explores the idea that a trauma survivor's experience of speaking out about the trauma event can depend on the context they are in. Survivors described their previous

experiences of speaking out as feeling standardised and impersonal (Barker et al., 2023; Hamber & Lundy, 2020). For example, individuals felt that their participation in the Northern Ireland HIAI was performative, in an attempt to legitimise the inquiry and use survivor stories for the benefit of the inquiry rather than addressing their specific needs (Hamber & Lundy, 2020, p. 755). This included the consultations for the inquiry not being victim centred as they were merely a "tick the box exercise" and those leading the consultations were "nearly putting words into [survivor's] mouths". Being in this context hence meant that survivors did not feel valued, found it harder to speak out about their story and reduced their desire to speak out further.

Alongside this, characteristics of individuals creating such spaces were important in making participants feel supported and hopeful. More specifically, where pressure was taken off from interactions, participants had the space to "recount their experience, be listened to and believed" (Hamber & Lundy, 2020, p.753) and "new personal insights" emerged (Taylor, 2002, p.155). Participants compared the confidential "relaxed environment" in the Acknowledgement Forum (as part of the HIAI) was a stark contrast to the "more intrusive public inquiry". The inquiry was held in a courthouse, and survivors were in close proximity to alleged perpetrators, survivors felt like they were the ones "on trial" and this experience was "threatening and humiliating" (Hamber & Lundy, 2020, p. 755). Also, having the option of not answering questions and researchers using creative ways (as opposed to traditional and standardised research approaches) of asking questions helped survivors not feel trapped (Campbell et al., 2010, p.72; Taylor, 2002, p.155). Furthermore, the dynamic nature of healing meant that trauma survivors' needs when sharing their stories were constantly changing. Thus, survivors found it particularly beneficial when the complexities of their traumas were acknowledged and they were offered choice and control over times and dates of interviews (Barker et al., 2023). This allowed individuals to feel empowered and at ease when speaking

out. Regardless of where they were in their healing journeys, trauma survivors noted that support and guidance was still essential, particularly through peers and role models (Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024; Barker et al., 2023).

Line of argument synthesis

From the themes outlined above, speaking out has internal (speaking out for personal healing) and external (speaking out for others) benefits. However, a survivor's experience of this is shaped by the context they are in. If individuals feel that they are speaking out as a formality or do not have control over how their stories are conveyed, they can feel regret and share less. Such experiences can hinder a trauma survivor's desire to speak out again in the future. Ultimately, as explored in the SIM and ESM, speaking out is not an act that only benefits an individual but a process that is determined by the ways in which external systems support them whilst speaking out.

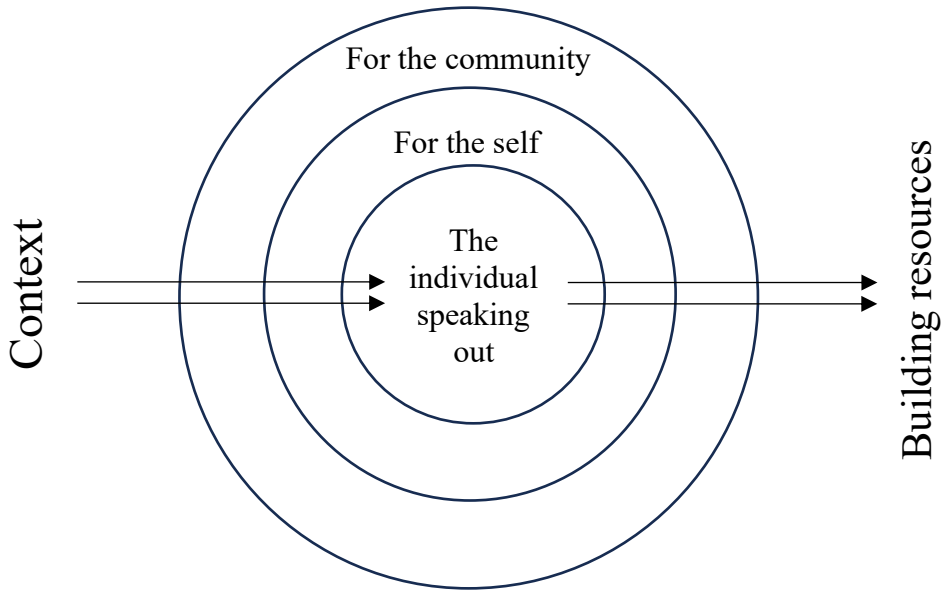
The findings can explain motivations for speaking out and factors that influence the act, using an overarching reference to building resources. Building resources can take the forms of developing better support programmes and strength within the survivor community. Additionally, building resources contributed to personal healing as trauma survivors referred to being empowered and developing their identity by steering away from being a victim towards being a person. Individuals found that speaking out about their experiences led to new realisations surrounding where in their healing journey they were, and the messages they received from those around them.

Figure 2 is a visual representation of the line of argument synthesis. It has been influenced by the SIM (Maercker & Horn, 2013) and relates to themes from this meta-ethnography. Based on the findings, the context can be a facilitator or a barrier to the individual's ultimate decision to speak out, whether it is for the self or the community.

Alongside this, speaking out has the potential to build resources for trauma survivors, other survivors (current or future) or the general public.

Figure 2.

Visual of the line of synthesis model



Note. Adapted from "A socio-interpersonal perspective on PTSD: The case for environments and interpersonal processes", by Maercker, A., & Horn, A. B., 2013, Clinical psychology & psychotherapy, 20(6), 465-481.

Discussion

Summary of main findings

This meta-ethnography aimed to review the experiences of trauma survivors when speaking out publicly. Three themes emerging from eight studies recruiting diverse and international samples, offered insight into a range of experiences through different means of publicly speaking out. The findings suggest that survivors speak out publicly about their trauma in an effort to build resources that can be beneficial to the public, other survivors or their own personal healing. However, their experience of this is determined by the context in which they are expected to speak out.

The findings imply that contextual factors when speaking out can shift survivor views of its benefits due to not having control over their story, not feeling heard or valued. Situations that create regret in trauma survivors can make them steer away from particular modes of speaking out, such as in inquiries (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). As such, this may limit the contexts in which survivors speak out, in turn reducing their access to audiences that need to hear their stories. Trauma survivors across all of the studies shared that whilst they experienced difficulties in retelling their stories, having a safe space, being reassured that they did not have to continue speaking or being informed that they could take breaks, led to positive experiences overall. The importance of context supports the claim of the SIM that individuals are influenced by internal aspects (such as beliefs about the self, shame and meaning making after trauma), close relationships and their broader social environment, all of which can reduce or intensify experiences of trauma and recovery (Maercker & Horn, 2013).

Although there is a power imbalance between a survivor and those that publicise their story (Deinyan, n.d.; Healey, 2020), this power imbalance can be managed by creating a sense of trust and prevent long-term retraumatisation. They can manage this power imbalance by ensuring that the input of trauma survivors is valued and they are given options in how they share their stories. Thus, the identified themes highlight that individualised approaches to managing the experience of speaking out is important since what survivors need when speaking out in research settings are different to what they may need during public inquiries.

Strengths and Limitations

The inclusion of different methods of speaking out publicly (including public speeches, inquiries and research participation) is a strength of this meta-ethnography as it offers a broad spectrum of settings that survivors speak out. Although the demographic information of participants in some of the studies were unknown, four out of eight studies had participants that

were majority non-white. This is another strength of the meta-ethnography as it offers unique insight into the experience of speaking out across different ethnic groups.

Despite the focus of this meta-ethnography being trauma survivors in general, the majority of the studies focused on sexual abuse. This may limit the validity of the findings in relation to other trauma types included such as suicide and floods. Alongside this, synthesising studies across different public settings can be challenging to draw generalisable conclusions, due to the different motivations and audiences involved. However, this was less of a limitation for this meta-ethnography since the aim was to explore public speaking broadly rather than the focus on the specific setting.

Rationale for the present study

Research has highlighted that trauma survivors may speak out to journalists for various reasons. As determined by the meta-ethnography, motivators to speaking out may be for personal healing purposes or to aid others in their healing journey whilst contextual factors can act as barriers to speaking out. Although limited, previous research has considered the experiences of trauma survivors speaking out to the press.

Approaches to journalistic reporting and ethics varies within and between countries (Healey, 2020, p.186). As explored previously, journalism is not a homogenous practice and can vary greatly across different types of newspapers or media platforms. The way news is presented can depend on financial pressures, editorial decisions, news values and audience expectations (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Hanitzsch et al. (2011) collated survey responses from journalists across 18 countries around their perceptions of influences on their work. They found that there are political (sources originating from a political context including government officials and censorship) and economic (such as profit expectations of media organisations and the needs of advertisers) factors that explain differences in reporting between countries. Despite this research not including UK journalists, it is reasonable to claim that cultural differences in

the influences on journalists will manifest itself in how they approach survivors. To the researcher's knowledge, no research to date has explored the experiences of sexual abuse survivors when speaking out to journalists in the UK.

As explored earlier, sexual abuse trauma manifests distinctly to other traumas. For example, previous research has suggested that sexual abuse stories are less favoured by audiences compared to "less stigmatising traumas" such as traffic fatalities or natural disasters (Delker et al., 2020). Thus, journalistic encounters of these groups are also likely to be different in many ways. There has been a move towards developing TIJ guidelines to ensure interviews create safety for trauma survivors (Miller, 2022; Quigley, 2023; Thompson, 2021). However, an exploration of specific needs of sexual abuse survivors during these interactions will support these guidelines further.

Aims and objectives

The central objective of this thesis was to explore the experiences of sexual abuse survivors being interviewed by journalists in the UK. Specific questions of interest were:

1) What are the motivators of speaking out to journalists for sexual abuse survivors?
2) What was the impact of being interviewed by journalists on sexual abuse survivors?
3) What would sexual abuse survivors want to be different in future interviews with journalists?

Chapter 2: Methods

Overview

This chapter will include a detailed account of the process taken to conduct this study. It will explore the study design used for this qualitative study, the ethical considerations taken prior to recruitment, the data analysis process and a reflexivity statement from the researcher.

Epistemological positioning and rationale for using a qualitative design

Over the years, the debate around identifying the most valuable methodology has been ongoing, qualitative versus quantitative methodologies. The measurement and development of knowledge is conceptualised as ontology, concerned with the nature of reality, and epistemology, the nature of human knowledge (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

Ontology and epistemology are on a continuum with positivism and interpretivism on both ends. Positivism assumes an objective reality and knowledge can be discoverable, observed and measured (Haig, 2013). Quantitative research uses numbers as data which are analysed using statistical techniques. Quantitative methodologies at times have been placed above qualitative methods due to an assumption that they offer rigorous hypothesis testing, identify consistent relationships between variables which allows replicability and generalisability (Jason & Glenwick, 2016 p.121). On the other hand, interpretivism assumes multiple, socially constructed realities and knowledge is subjective which can be co-created (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Qualitative methodologies use words as data using various methods for collection and analysis allowing for an exploration of subjective, in-depth and personal experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The epistemological position of the researcher is important to consider as it impacts the choices researchers take as part of the project. The present study adopted a critical realist stance, which stands in between positivism and interpretivism. This position theorises that objective reality does exist whilst acknowledging the role of human experiences and

perceptions in understanding reality (Bhaskar, 2020). Since survivor accounts of their interactions with journalists reflect real events that have happened, survivor experiences are shaped by societal influences such as power dynamics, stigma, and journalistic practices. To explore survivor views and experiences, the study adopted a qualitative design.

Critical realists begin with a societal problem that is guided by theory, but they must not stay committed to specific theories as they can be conditional in nature (Fletcher, 2017). The initial theory underpinning the research can facilitate deeper analysis that can extend or deny the initial theory to build a more accurate explanation of reality. This aligns with this research as there is a need to explore the ways sexual abuse survivors' experiences with journalism support, elaborate or oppose the existing literature.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Essex ethics committee on 12th March 2024 (ETH2324-1015) (see Appendix 2). As this study did not include healthcare participant data from the NHS, NHS ethical approval was not obtained. Various ethical issues were considered, and plans were made based on these issues, which are explained below.

Informed consent

In the initial recruitment email, the researcher briefly explained the study and encouraged sexual abuse survivors to carefully read through the information sheet sent to them. There were two versions of the information sheet, one that is relevant for those recruited from the media support organisation supporting recruitment (see Appendix 3) and for those recruited word of mouth (see Appendix 4). Informed consent was sought via written form (see Appendix 5 and 6) from all participants prior to arranging an interview. This included reminded them that participation was voluntary and they can withdraw their data at any point up until the project was completed without any consequences. The participants were offered opportunities to ask any questions via email. If participants were happy with the information they read on the

information sheet and consent form, they were required to sign the consent form and return it to the researcher.

Confidentiality and personal data

The signed consent forms sent back to the researcher were stored confidentially in a password protected document and folder on a secure University of Essex network. The recordings of the online interviews were recorded on the videoconferencing platform used and saved into a password-protected folder on the secure network. All data, including consent forms and demographics forms, were kept electronically and saved on a password-protected folder on the secure network. The password-protected documents and folders were only accessed by the primary researcher.

Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and any identifiable information was anonymised before starting the analysis. A copy of the information recorded about the participant was provided upon request. Participant transcripts, demographic information and consent forms were identified using pseudonyms. There was a list that linked pseudonyms to each participant, but this was kept securely in a password protected document on the secure network. Whilst transcribing the interviews, any identifiable information including locations or individuals (particularly other survivors or journalist names), were removed. This was particularly important since the survivors may have referred to details of their journalist interviews which could identify them.

Jo Healey (a former journalist and a trainer of journalists) and a media support organisation was involved in the early stages of this research project as a stakeholder in the research. Jo Healey offered the primary researcher supervision in gaining a deeper understanding of journalism. This included providing insight into the newsroom cultures that may impact the way individual journalists interact with trauma survivors and the most up to date research that was being carried out in the field. This was important as it ensured that this

research was meaningful for journalism practice, research and for trauma survivors. While the input from an experienced journalist specialising in trauma reporting was valuable, there is an absence of perspective from non-specialist journalists. Consulting a non-specialist journalist prior to conducting interviews could have offered alternative perspectives such as how sexual abuse narratives are managed outside of specialist reporting. This may have also highlighted gaps in practice that could have informed the development of interview questions for survivors.

A media support organisation (anonymised to maintain the confidentiality of the participants recruited from this organisation) that works towards creating safe and supportive networks for those involved with the media supported the researcher with recruitment through their mailing list. Jo Healey and the media support organisation did not have access to any of the forms that had identifiable information, interview recordings, transcripts or any other information about the participants.

Participants were informed that if they are mentioned in publications, assignments, or reports, all identifying details will be removed and pseudonyms will be used. It was made clear on the information sheet and consent form that once a publication has been made, withdrawal of contribution would not be possible, but their contribution will remain anonymous. It was highlighted that data and linked files will be deleted after four years.

Safety and risk

The information sheet outlines the benefits and risks of participating in this research. There was a risk that participants would get upset when discussing their difficult interactions with journalists. As a Trainee Clinical Psychologist, the primary researcher had therapeutic skills to acknowledge and respond to distress. At the start of the interview, the participant and the researcher discussed the potentially emotionally distressing content of the interviews and explored the best approach to take for the participants if they become distressed such as taking a break or stopping the interview. Sensitive interviewing techniques were followed as outlined

by Dempsey et al. (2016) to develop rapport and engage in active listening including being flexible for participants, humour when appropriate, offering validation and using compassionate language.

Signposting information included in the information sheet referred to reaching out to the various survivor support organisations were listed as services they can access for further support as well as the media support organisation (if they were recruited through them). The primary researcher was trained in assessing risk and supporting people through the use of grounding techniques such as breath work and the use of the five senses to reduce anxiety during and after the interviews. If the researcher was concerned about information shared in the interviews (such as disclosure of perpetrator information) or safeguarding issues, this was agreed to be discussed in supervision on the best course of action on a case-by-case basis. The researcher recognised the power imbalance present in the study, particularly in the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine who was eligible to take part in the study. This imbalance was further reinforced by the researcher having control over how survivor stories were interpreted and disseminated, which ultimately shaped the way their experiences were represented publicly. They ensured to regularly inform participants of the research process before and during interviews, whilst making a plan to share the findings of the study with the participants.

The subject matter was challenging at times, especially when survivors shared details of the sexual abuse experience and the lack of support from others. However, the primary researcher addressed the emotional impact of the interviews on themselves through exploring this in individual supervision, peer supervision and when needed, taking a step back from the project to use self-care strategies. Additionally, the researcher communicated with survivors only via their university email and the linked Zoom or Microsoft Teams accounts. This was to prevent participants from contacting the researcher after the project ended on their personal

email. The researcher limited checking and responding to project related emails outside of the hours designated for the project. This ensured that they maintained a work-life balance, whilst completing other assignments too, and avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Participants and Procedures

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they engaged in at least one interaction with a journalist about their experiences of sexual abuse in the UK. This included journalist interviews (in person, virtual or over the phone), written methods of being interviewed, or public statements with journalists regarding their sexual abuse experiences. Individuals who self-identified as sexual abuse survivors (including sexual assault, rape or child sexual abuse) were included. A definition of sexual abuse was not given to the participants, and they were not expected to share details of the sexual abuse unless they wanted to. Participants were recruited regardless of how long ago the sexual abuse occurred and regardless of how long ago their interactions with the journalists were. Participants over the age of 18 were included. Participants expressing any sexual orientation, gender identity or cultural, religious or racial background were included.

Participants were excluded if they did not interact with journalists directly or if they spoke out about their sexual abuse only on social media (with no journalist involvement). Participants were excluded if they were under the age of 18 or unable to consent to taking part. Those who do not have access to a videoconferencing platform were also excluded.

There is an increase in fraudulent participants in research in recent years, especially since the use of online recruitment (Kumarasamy et al., 2024). If the researcher noticed any inconsistencies in their interactions with the potentially fraudulent participants, they agreed to discuss this in supervision for a plan of action. Based on conversations in supervision, additional screening steps could be added where the researcher plans a brief call with these

individuals to verify their suitability for the study. This includes asking about their journalistic interactions to ascertain the level of detail offered by the individual, confirm that they are a sexual abuse survivor and inform them that the researcher will be in touch.

Recruitment and Interview Procedure

A purposive sampling method and a snowball method was employed to recruit survivors to this study. Participants were initially recruited through the media support organisation by sending the research poster to their mailing list. The recruitment poster included an explanation of what the participants can expect from the study, contact details for the researcher and a clear comment on the reimbursement for participation. The email sent out included a call for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, cultural or religious beliefs. This was to ensure that all individuals felt comfortable to participating in the research. Other survivors were forwarded the research poster from the participants of the study.

Once the posters were distributed, the researcher contacted those who expressed an interest to participate via email. This initial contact involved the survivors being sent an information pack including the information sheet, consent form, demographic questionnaire, and the contact details of the research team. Before arranging the interview, the participants read the information sheet that reiterates confidentiality and the right to withdraw as well as highlighting that the recording will be stored securely. It was made clear that the results of the study may be shared with colleagues or used in a scientific journal whilst keeping their identity anonymous. The information sheet also included information about the general topic of the questions that would be asked in the interview process so they can be prepared for the questions.

To indicate that they read and understood the information sheet, participants were expected to return a signed copy of the consent form before an interview was arranged. Those

who returned their signed consent form and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix 7), were screened to ensure that those taking part were eligible for the study, including looking at their age and the information provided about their journalist interactions. The participants and the primary researcher then mutually agreed on a date and time to conduct the online interview in a quiet and confidential space. If the participant could not find a quiet and confidential space, the researcher discussed this further in supervision on a case-by-case basis.

The interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher with supervision. The interviews started by introducing the primary researcher, outlining the researcher's use of supervision and reiterating confidentiality (including having access to a quiet and confidential space). Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason and that they could decline to answer any question during the interview. The plans for dissemination of the findings were shared with the participants. Participants were also asked if they had any questions prior to commencing the interviews. Interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes (with most of them lasting 60 minutes) and it was determined whether the participant had that time available at the start of the interview. The participants were reminded that the interviews were going to be recorded, and they were asked if that was still okay for them, before proceeding with recording the interview.

At the end of the interviews, the primary researcher had a debrief with each participant. This included discussing how they felt, undertaking a risk assessment if necessary and reminding them of the support services outlined in the information sheet. A £20 gift voucher was offered to each participant as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Data collection

There was more interest from sexual abuse survivors than the project could accommodate. Roughly 35 people expressed interest in the two days after the poster was distributed to the mailing list. However, due to limitations of time and funding, only 15 sexual

abuse survivors were interviewed. Priority was given to participants based on the chronological order of their initial expression of interest. If an individual did not return the consent form to the researcher or decided not to continue with the research, the next person in line was contacted.

All participants who returned the consent form and agreed to participate were invited to a semi-structured qualitative interview with the primary researcher. Interviews were conducted via videoconferencing platforms (such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom) to offer participants flexibility in participating. Participants were asked whether they have preferences of time and day of the week. Their preferences were then considered alongside the researcher's availability. This was important as it meant that participants could ensure that they would join the interviews in a private space. All interviews were recorded using the recording feature on the videoconferencing platforms and saved in a folder that was password-protected on a secure network.

Demographic information

Self-reported demographic information was obtained which included age, gender and ethnicity. This information was collected using a brief questionnaire with open-ended responses to allow participants to self-identify in their own terms. Additional information was gathered around how often participants were interviewed by journalists, the mode of contact with journalists, whether the interview was published (if so, where) and how long ago they were interviewed.

Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview structure enables rapport-building whilst ensuring a level of consistency across different participants (Willig, 2013). This structure allows flexibility for participants to share their own experiences and for the researcher to ask further questions about their unique experiences. A limitation of semi-structured interviews is that they capture

participant views in isolation and do not allow for the interaction between participants that can encourage building upon one another's experiences. A methodology combining semi-structured interviews and focus groups would have been preferred as this would have offered insight into personal experiences whilst providing an interactive space that exposes shared or different views about speaking to journalists. However, this was not possible to do in the present study due to time constraints.

The potential interview questions and schedule were developed prior to the interviews with the support of the researcher's supervisors, peer supervision and Jo Healey (see Appendix 8). In peer supervision, the researcher received both emotional and practical support from researchers working in the field of sexual abuse too. Consultation with a researcher who had lived experience of sexual abuse was valuable in shaping the interview questions and schedule. They suggested including less sensitive questions at the beginning of the interview to allow rapport building before moving onto asking for more detail. They encouraged the researcher to think about follow-up questions (to open questions asked) that could encourage survivors to share more.

Following on from this, the interview schedule included some prompts for the researcher during interviews whilst allowing space for questions to be guided by the information the participants provided. The interview schedule included follow up questions to obtain further details of participant interactions with journalists. All interviews began with a question asking their general knowledge of journalists prior to being interviewed. This was to ensure that the researcher and participant had enough time to develop rapport prior to delving into personal interactions with journalists and potentially deeper topics. This was also to allow the researcher to gauge the individual differences between participants, as some may be willing to share more earlier on in the interview than others.

The researcher then explored one interaction at a time (if participants had been interviewed multiple times) to allow detailed discussions about each experience. The participants were asked to recount the context of their interactions with journalists including whether interview was in person, online or via written communication and the platform (such as television, newspaper, magazine, online article) in which the interview was published. As the participants started sharing more about their interactions with the journalists, the participants and the researcher were able to explore their feelings towards the interactions such as why they wanted to speak to journalists initially and what they would have wanted to be different.

Data analysis

Analytical approach

A reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) approach was used for this project (Braun and Clarke, 2021, 2022). This method enables analysis and interpretation of patterns across a qualitative dataset. Throughout analysis, reflexivity is considered to ensure that the researcher critically reflects on how their professional and personal background, and their research process impact the analysis. Therefore, generating themes is not a passive process but is influenced by the researcher's subjective values, skills and epistemological position.

This approach was chosen as it is recommended for exploring commonalities in participant experiences rather than an in-depth focus on individual meaning making. This approach allows an exploration of how the lived experience of participants are located within the social climate they are in (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012). Reflexive TA is not attached to a specific theoretical framework, which makes it applicable to various frameworks including critical realism. Considering the current social climate around journalism, discussions of sexual abuse and the ongoing developments in TIJ, it is crucial to generate findings that highlight shared experiences and can inform practice.

Finally, reflexive TA allows the researcher to critically reflect on their relationship to the data, their interpretative role and the broader social context. Reflexivity was particularly important for study due to the sensitive nature of the topic. The researcher's own background, upbringing and personal values are influential in shaping the analysis and the generation of themes. Therefore, the researcher's interest in the topic further supported the use of this approach.

Other approaches considered

Other analytical methods were considered. Narrative analysis, which interprets human experiences through the stories people tell (McAllum et al., 2019), offers rich insight by focusing on the ways identity is constructed through storytelling. Whilst this analysis offers a deeper understanding of how survivors speak about their experiences, it was not deemed in line with the aims of the current study due to the focus on each participants narrative separately.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which explores how people make sense of their experiences whilst acknowledging researcher subjectivity (Smith et al., 2009) was also considered. However, IPA is best suited for small sample pools (less than 10 participants) and research focused on personal meaning making (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012). Due to the limited literature around sexual abuse survivors' perspectives about their journalist interactions, a larger sample size and a focus on commonalities between participants were deemed more appropriate.

The objective of Grounded Theory (GT) is to develop a theory systematically from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which did not align with the study's aims. The aim and research questions of this research project reflects an understanding of shared patterns across participants, rather than a rich level of detail about lived experiences and develop theories based off the data. Reflexive TA was more in line with offering opportunities for having a shared understanding of experiences in order to develop practical outcomes to the findings. The

practical outcomes would be more suited to allowing professionals to easily understand what works and does not work in journalistic practice.

Phases of analysis for Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The analysis followed the six phases outlined for the reflexive TA approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.35). Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher engaged in reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to familiarise themselves with the qualitative data (see Appendix 9). Throughout this, any ideas or initial thoughts around the data or the dataset as a whole were noted down.

Stage one of reflexive TA involves the researcher familiarising themselves with the data. They listen to the interview recordings, transcribe, read and re-read the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher immersed themselves within the data by reading repeatedly in an active way by making notes alongside this to highlight possible meanings and patterns. A computer software package, NVivo 13, was used to aid this process.

Stage two of reflexive TA involves generating initial codes from the data. The researcher considered manifest and latent meaning alongside considering the researchers own views and what participants were saying and meaning. The aim of this stage is to generate many different codes that differ in meaning.

Stage three of reflexive TA includes generating the initial themes. Themes are defined as a "pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.77). The process of generating initial themes involved using codes to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset, through collating codes that share an overarching idea or concept to develop preliminary themes (see Appendix 10).

Stage four was developing and reviewing the themes. This allows the researcher to extend on the themes that have been developed throughout the process. This is done by considering any changes that may be needed too such as combining sub-themes or themes.

Stage five included defining and renaming themes. This was the process of defining and redefining themes according to the data and in relation to the research question. Patterns within themes were identified to consider broader implications. Some themes were named with striking quotes from the participants (Braun & Clark, 2006). It was ensured that the name of the themes and sub-themes accurately portrayed the content within the theme or sub-theme. This also includes going over the quotations to ensure there is no misrepresentation.

Stage 6 included writing up. The purpose of the writing up is to tell a story using the themes (Braun & Clarke 2022). The researcher is aiming to portray their findings with examples from the data and explore the meaning of the patterns found. The write up should be based upon the research aim and questions.

Reflexivity statement

Reflexive TA emphasises the importance of demonstrating self-reflexivity in the ways in which the researcher's experiences and assumptions may have interacted with the analysis and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Therefore, a reflexive diary was kept throughout the research and a summary of this has been included here. This includes my upbringing, assumptions and previous professional experiences, including my acknowledgement of the power dynamics between researcher and participants.

This research project was influenced by my area of interest around the processes that go into the ways in which crimes are presented in the media (such as on the news, magazines, social media and TV documentaries). Over the years, this has led me to question how survivor's stories are portrayed and how these representations in the media shape the public understandings of sexual abuse and survivors. I have always been curious about the processes behind the screens, especially discussions around protecting survivors' anonymity (such as making their face and voice unrecognisable) and how these agreements are made with survivors. This interest evolved into a curiosity about the survivor experiences of the fast-paced

and ever-changing media industry and whether the publicised stories accurately depict their personal narrative. With the rise of true crime content being shared online by creators on YouTube, I noticed that there are variations in the ways creators speak about traumatic events and survivors. Some approach these stories with respect, by including survivor or family accounts in their videos, whereas others seemingly are indifferent to respecting survivors' experiences. Witnessing the criticism faced by creators that are indifferent or disrespectful sparked my interest in understanding survivor views around how others are approaching them and sharing their stories.

Upon reflecting on my interest in this area, I noticed the impact my upbringing had on this. Growing up in the UK with middle eastern immigrant parents, sex and sexual abuse was a taboo subject. When sexual abuse was spoken about (usually due to news reports), I was surrounded by mostly victim-blaming or shameful narratives. People around me often held a "one-size-fits-all" view of survivors, assuming that most of them remained highly distressed post-sexual abuse. This early exposure to the way survivors were spoken about increased my awareness of how social discourses may distort perceptions of survivors whilst silencing them.

During the ethical approval process for this project, I assumed that survivors would require a high level of support from me, especially in terms of supporting them to use grounding techniques. This assumption was partly influenced by my clinical experience with individuals facing mental health difficulties. Upon reflection, I recognised that it may have also stemmed from narratives shaped by my upbringing about survivor vulnerability and healing processes. After discussing this with peers at university, they shared similar thoughts. However, this was not my experience when I started conducting the interviews.

My position as a qualitative researcher was new to me as my previous thesis projects during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies involved an online survey and a secondary data analysis. Despite my vast clinical experience, I was conscious about the transition I had to

make from being a clinician to a researcher. This involved maintaining the balance between sensitivity, obtaining data that addresses the research questions and producing a piece of work that is reflective of the survivor's experiences. The position as a researcher can lack altruism as it involves asking survivors to share their narratives with me, rather than offering therapeutic containment (as a clinician). I aimed to ease into this role as a researcher by discussing this in one-to-one supervision and peer supervision for sexual abuse researchers in the earlier stages of data collection. This helped me acknowledge the power I held as a researcher, learn from other researchers and have the opportunity to discuss my interview plans. The direct involvement of Jo Healey ensured that I received additional support from someone invested in the mental wellbeing of survivors and journalists. Jo's involvement was invaluable as it prevented me from feeling like an outsider researching the area prior to doing the interviews.

Dissemination

This thesis will be on the University of Essex online library following the completion of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. The researcher will share the findings with Jo Healey who will aid in disseminating them within the journalism sector. There are a number of potential audiences that may benefit from the findings of this research. Student or newly graduated journalists may find that the themes offer them a deeper understanding of the way survivors experience interviews with journalists. This could encourage them to consider taking a 'trauma lens' to interviewing. The researcher plans to disseminate the findings to students by presenting at journalism departments at universities across the UK. This will offer spaces for students to reflect on and discuss their experiences and perspectives on working with trauma survivors.

Alongside this, experienced journalists may be interested in identifying potential practice gaps from survivors' perspectives. Additionally, those in positions of power within media organisation may be interested in the findings as it may highlight ways that systemic

change can occur, by normalising and incorporating the use of trauma-informed approaches to journalism. The researcher plans to submit the study for publication in peer-reviewed journals such as Journalism and websites such as The Conversation. This is to ensures that the findings reach a broad audience, including academics in journalism studies, media professionals and the general public.

Finally, sexual abuse survivors (or trauma survivors in general) may find the results of this study beneficial. Sharing the outcomes of the study with the participants and those interacting with journalists is important to ensure they can see how their contributions have shaped the research and the impact their participation has had. The findings will be disseminated through an infographic designed by the researcher and distributed via the media support organisation that supported the researcher with recruitment. Using an infographic will ensure that the results of the study are accessible for all survivors.

Chapter Three: Results

Sample demographics

Interviews were conducted with fifteen participants who met the inclusion criteria and identified that they were sexual abuse survivors. A summary of those who took part in the interviews is shown in Table 3.

Of the 15 participants, 11 were female and eight indicated their ethnicity as White British. Three indicated that they were “Black British”, two indicated that they were “Black”, two indicated that they were “White Other”. To ensure anonymity, participant ages were categorised into the following age: 18-25, 26-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and 65+. The average age of the participants was 44.93 years (mean = 16.09).

Participants were asked about the number of times they interacted with journalists in a demographic’s questionnaire. Ten participants had been interviewed by different journalists and media platforms at least four times and the remaining participants mentioned speaking once or twice to one journalist. They were also asked when their last interview with a journalist was and the responses ranged from two weeks to five years. Twelve participants interacted with journalists in the past year.

Their reflections seemed to be shaped by the number of times they were interviewed. Those with more experience interviewing generally had longer interviews during the study due to giving responses that were thorough and nuanced. They were captured across multiple themes (such as copyright over pictures and gaining support from survivor organisations) due to drawing upon years of interviewing experience. However, those with less experience had shorter interviews and offered responses that were reflected in less themes, mostly focusing on the difficulties they experienced with the resurfacing of their trauma and why they spoke out in the first place.

Table 3.

Demographics of the participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Number of times interviewed
Penny	35-44	Female	"Quite a few"
Lee	65+	Male	"Very many times over 20+ years"
George	45-54	Male	"Literally a few dozen times over the last 8 years"
Mary	18-24	Female	"Once
Ally	45-54	Female	"At least 4 times"
William	26-34	Male	"1"
Cara	55-64	Female	"5 or 6 times"
Lesley	55-64	Female	"4/5 times"
Charlie	18-25	Male	"Once"
Florence	55-64	Female	"Approximately 12"
Emma	55-64	Female	"Around 10"
Elizabeth	26-34	Female	"Twice"
Sarah	26-34	Female	"5"
Lily	18-25	Female	"Twice"
Rose	55-64	Female	"Many"

Overview of the themes

Themes are presented with quotes extracted from the interviews with participants. They are presented in italics and have slight changes for ease of reading and/or to maintain anonymity. Dotted lines at the start or at the end of the quotes indicate that the participants were speaking prior to or after the quotes. Dotted lines throughout the quotes were used to indicate the researcher's decision to edit out irrelevant details without losing the meaning of

the quote (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.134). Any identifiable information was replaced with neutral information that the participant was referring to. For example, if they gave the name of a specific news organisation, this was removed and replaced by: [news organisation]. In order to maintain anonymity, participants were given pseudonyms.

Table 4 provides a summary of four main themes and 10 sub-themes. When sub-themes are referenced within the analysis, they will be referenced using the theme number and sub-theme number. For example, the sub-theme "The one-sided business transaction of survivor stories" will be referred to as 'Sub-Theme 3.3'.

Across all four themes, references to power, control and trust consistently emerged as underlying factors impacting the participants experiences with journalists. These references will be highlighted within each sub-theme that they are most relevant to.

Table 4.

Summary of the themes and sub-themes from the interviews

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Interviews create purpose and empowerment	1.1 The dynamic relationship with wanting to be heard 1.2 Helping others by creating conversation
2. An act of collaboration	2.1 A space for flexibility and hope 2.2 Support from others that understand
3. Challenges faced in the interview process	3.1 The psychological toll of speaking out 3.2 A lack of understanding from journalists 3.3 The one-sided business transaction of survivor stories 3.4 "Ghosted by journalists": the impact of being ignored
4. "Treat me as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews	4.1 Communication is key 4.2 Offering opportunities for check-ins

Theme 1: Interviews create purpose and empowerment

The first theme explores survivors; motivations for speaking to journalists. Throughout the interviews, survivors described having a clear purpose when sharing their stories and feeling empowered after years of silence. Sub-theme 1.1 conveys the evolving nature of their reasons for speaking out. This included having more insight due to speaking out more or encountering negative experiences when speaking out. Sub-theme 2 encapsulates a desire to make a change within the survivor community by sharing their personal experiences and normalising struggles.

The dynamic relationship with wanting to be heard

Across the interviews there was a particular focus on participants wanting a space to share their experience after years of being silenced and regain a sense of control over their story. Throughout their responses, there was the emphasis of "I just wanted to be heard" (Ally) and "I never had a voice as a child" (Lee), which highlighted the specific goal that the survivors had when deciding to speak to journalists. Participants reflected on the impact a lack of safe space since the sexual abuse had on them, particularly around internalising their struggles and suppressing a part of their identity. Therefore, they had a desire to use their voices as adults to act against the years of silence they had endured, as portrayed in the quote by William.

"[after speaking out] I had this inner peace that for long, I have kept some stories to myself and I wasn't able to tell anyone." - William

Having a space to be heard instilled a sense of control for participants over their lives and was empowering since they "felt very much that I was giving a [middle finger]" (Lesley) to the abuser. This was a direct contrast to their experiences during and since being sexually abused.

"I think also a bit of it is taking back control […] you're not in control during the abuse. You're not in control when you go through the criminal justice system, but then at least now I

can be in control of a little bit of a narrative of what happened to me and how we can make a change." – Sarah

Although speaking out empowered participants, Mary and Lily spoke about the discomfort they experienced when retelling their story to a journalist for the first few times.

"It's more like scars, which you're going back to […] it was very difficult, but I feel like it was the right time to let go and share it with someone. So, it really messed up my mental health that period but I feel like it was the best thing to do, and now I'm much better."– Mary

"The second interview was a different experience […] I was in a better place emotionally. I was in a safer space mentally because I felt like I had [other spaces for emotional release such as therapy and support services] something that I didn't have before […] it was different this time because I could share comfortably without crying. That's something that I couldn't do during the first interview, and with things that I was too scared to say the first time that I was able to say now." – Lily

The quotes spoke about discomfort during different points of speaking to journalists. Mary's quote highlights the level of pain they have experienced, enough for it to leave a scar. Mary likening the pain of sexual abuse to leaving a scar and that going back to it can be visualised as the wound reopening each time the survivor speaks about their experiences. Similarly, earlier on in their interview, Lily mentioned that reading their story once it was written up made them cry as they thought about the difficult period they went through to get to the better place they were currently in. The participants were aware that sharing their story of sexual abuse was going to be difficult and attributed this to their natural progression within their healing journey. There is a sense of wanting to be heard in these quotes too but more so about acknowledging the need to allow oneself to go through their individual healing journey and eventually finding it easier to speak out. As Lesley summarised it: "…the benefit of

speaking out, unfortunately outweighs the pain of doing interviews…we want our story to be told, we want to be believed…". However, there were individual differences in how survivors progress through the healing journey. This was either through developing their own boundaries to reduce the impact of interviews (explored further within this Sub-Theme), support groups or a collaborative approach by journalists (discussed further in Theme 2).

Following on from the importance of where they were on their healing journey, the motivation to being heard was guided by boundaries they developed for some participants. In their earlier interviews, Lesley went from not speaking about the sexual abuse to feeling a lack of control over their ability to stop talking about it. They wanted to be heard but had no experience at that point to develop appropriate boundaries and control the narrative.

"So the way I describe it is that there's a gag that's so big you can hardly eat or breathe or anything. And when that gag is removed, you just can't stop talking […] there comes a time where you talk, talk, talk, talk, talk." – Lesley

As the participants interviewed more and developed personal boundaries for how they wanted to share their stories, they reached a point in their healing journey where speaking out fulfilled their need to be heard. This took survivors "years of practice" (Penny).

"I think as for me in my recovery, as I understand more around you know the systematic issues and my own belief of what happened and I trust myself, I believe myself, my friends believe me, having a journalist listen, it's not as important anymore […] It's allowed me to speak about my frustrations. It's allowed me to be listened to." – Sarah

"You start losing your voice and you need to give your vocal chords a bit of a rest. And I'm sort of at that stage now where I don't […] really need to tell my story anymore. I feel as if I've been heard." – Lesley

The initial motivation for participants to be heard can be counterproductive after a while. Speaking out was initially empowering for Lesley, as it offered power to "control my

body, my voice, my person over [the perpetrator]". However, this eventually became parallel to Lesley's experience of not understanding "sexual boundaries, body boundaries, body autonomy" during and after sexual abuse. Noticing that they no longer need to speak out to be heard, there was a sense of empowerment when they could decide the parameters of interviews. For example, putting boundaries in place to get written confirmation that their story will be published before progressing to talk about their story (as discussed further in Sub-Theme 3.4).

Helping others by creating conversation

Participants shared that aside from breaking their silence, another motivator for speaking to journalists was to help out other survivors, future generations or the general public by sharing their story. Speaking to journalists and raising awareness about underrepresented stories of sexual abuse was represented their need to have such representations during the sexual abuse or throughout their healing journey. Charlie spoke about being motivated that they will "be helping people through the interview by creating conversation that sexual abuse [does not only impact] females, but males as well". Charlie's motivation to speak out was rooted in the underrepresented stories of male sexual abuse due to the shame and societal stereotypes around males. Alongside this, Lee spoke about giving permission for children to speak out, which was reflective of their own experience of not having "a voice as a child".

"I always used to feel I may have just saved another child. Or I may have given permission to another survivor to speak out, because speaking out, I think, is important" – Lee

Some participants shared that they have been approached by media organisations that they did not agree with the way they publish stories or do not agree with the way they proposed to publish the survivors' story (e.g. using anonymous photographs in the case of Lesley). However, many participants shared that the interviews were not meant to be serving their needs but helping survivors by being a voice for them. This was highlighted by the participants referencing "swallowed my snobbery […] and thought this might change someone's life"

(Ally) and “I took my ego out of it because it isn't about me” (Lesley). Although this was a choice that did not have many psychological consequences for some participants, Lesley spoke about paying a price for accepting their story being anonymous. Despite wanting to advocate for other survivors, this way of sharing their story felt “self-sacrificing” of the empowerment they gain over the abuser by speaking out publicly.

For some participants, having a clear agenda was essential to ensure the interview helped the audience. Whilst they wanted their story to be one of inspiration for other survivors to speak out, there was a desire to offer an accurate representation of the struggles in the aftermath of sexual abuse too. This was to avoid the audience seeing survivor stories in the media and having a skewed representation of the struggles one goes through to get to a point where they can speak openly about their experiences.

“…we want to encourage, but you don't wanna give any false promises […] when you say to someone, it really does take time, but you really can heal. There's a sense of relief. It's kind of like you understand this is huge […] We just gotta be so careful and the media has to be so careful how they communicate.” – George

“…on paper I can look quite fine […] but it took a long time to become fine […] I wanted to have it clear that I'd had different support at different points in my life…” – Penny

Alongside sharing the realities of being a sexual abuse survivor, there was the hope that people hearing their stories would allow them space to rethink their own experiences. Participants referred to some people not realising that they may have experienced or be experiencing sexual abuse.

“I feel like there are a lot of people out there […] who are going through worst situations, but they are not quite aware of certain things or certain helps they could get […] So that was a key motivation for me.” - Mary

Theme 2 - An act of collaboration

The second theme explores the factors that ensure participants have a collaborative experience in the interviews with journalists. Whilst participants found that their sense of control gradually increased over time, having collaborative interviews were beneficial at all stages of healing. The journalists that stood out offered participants space to explore shared goals and sent them the final interview (written or video version). Alongside this, offers of flexibility and the right context to make the participant feel at ease was valued (Sub-Theme 2.1). Finally, whether or not this was encouraged by journalists, participants found it useful to have support around boundaries and the technical aspects of interviews from others with knowledge or lived experience of sexual abuse around interviews (Sub-Theme 2.2).

Throughout this theme, participants mentioned that some journalists worked hard to make the interviewing process as collaborative as possible. More specifically, journalists invested in survivors' stories and instilled trust by honouring the suggestions or boundaries of the survivors. In a quote by Ally, the repetition of "we really worked together" and "she really worked with me" indicates the value they placed on the efforts the journalist made to offer Ally some control over their story. Similarly for Lee, feeling like they were "part of a process" by speaking to producers prior to the interviews was reassuring.

"We spoke beforehand about what angle we wanted to get across and what messages we could put in the article. And then I told her my story. And then she kind of pulled out bits to fit the narrative that we wanted to get across. So, we really worked together […] she really wanted to do something good. We really discussed, OK, what are the messages? Let's take two or three messages we can try and put in the piece…" – Ally

Interestingly, participants expressed how the collaborative nature of their interactions shifted their perceptions of power dynamics over time. Participants shared how their initial feelings of intimidation during conversations with journalists was eventually replaced by the

view that such interactions were mutually beneficial. This transition could be attributed to participant's progress in their healing journeys and the number of times they shared their stories with journalists. As such, they would have developed the confidence to establish points they wanted to address in interviews and aspects of their story they did not wish to be changed. This demonstrates that whilst journalists have expertise in presenting survivor stories, collaborating is vital to capture the unique insights of survivors.

"It was almost like pick your battles. It was like, I felt much more comfortable saying, no, I want this bit phrased in this way. I'm happy for you to edit those bits so it will flow properly on the page, like kind of respecting their expertise… like, okay, you have that bit. I wanna keep this bit." – Penny

However, this shift in power dynamics was different for Emma as it was empowering to write their own story with the journalist only helping with the editing. Being offered more ownership over their story by writing it themselves, shifted the power dynamics between the journalist and survivor. This experience was valuable since their story was fully being heard rather than cut up into segments (as it did previously for TV interviews).

"…it felt quite good cause I was able to tell my story without it being chopped to like a second or three seconds […] it had more impact and was quite satisfying to be able to tell my own story, you know, in my own words." – Emma

Furthermore, some participants made it clear that a goal for collaboration was to avert any negative consequences either they or journalists might encounter.

"…they did [let me read part of the article] because I guess they're worried from a legal point of view…they've got to make sure that they're accurate, because they're the ones that could get sued…" – Florence

Following on from the possible consequences experienced by participants, there were references to the permanence of interviews and the fact that it is hard to "change the narrative" (Lily) of a story once it has been publicised.

A space for flexibility and hope

Seven participants described the importance of journalists being proactive and creating a safe space during interviews. This included the willingness of journalists to accommodate the interview preferences of the participants, and these professionals explaining why they may communicate with them via certain methods. As they felt at ease with the journalists and the process, participants referred to feeling more comfortable with sharing the difficult parts of their story. Overall, having their preferences being accommodated was one of the reasons participants developed trust in journalists, alongside feeling hopeful about the outcomes of interviews.

"...having the meeting online [...] we had enough time to talk. Even at times when I couldn't [share], he just let me rest for some time and continue..." – Mary

"When I said I needed face to face, it was done [...] and then the first day, he was punctual [...] so that's like things that actually pushed me [to share more]. There was consistency, there was availability, there was flexibility and then there was hope." – Elizabeth

Moreover, it was important for journalists to acknowledge that participants had their own life and family which needed to be worked around when being interviewed. For example, earlier on in their interview Emma stated that sharing their story was not like "talking to the gas board about your meter reading" where it did not matter who was in the room. Therefore, simply being informed about the details of the interview means that survivors could make alterations to their commitments and location to have some privacy. Extending on this view, being communicated interview details appeared crucial for survivors to know that their psychological needs were prioritised by journalists too. This is reflective of survivors wanting

to be treated as a person, rather than only being seen as important due to what journalists gain from their story (as discussed further in Theme 4).

"I always prefer it if a call is gonna be in the morning because then I won't spend the whole day, kind of thinking about it […] once it's finished, I can get on with my day and I'm not […] anticipating how it's going to go..." – Emma

As conveyed by Emma's words, one psychological need is managing their emotional reaction before, during and after an interview. This is unsurprising as recalling memories of sexual abuse can be re-traumatising and painful, irrespective of how many times they spoke out since their first interview. A desire to receive as much information and choice around interviews was a common experience amongst the participants.

Alongside accommodating the practical needs of participants, journalists offering spaces that allowed survivors the option to decline answers to interview questions was vital. Charlie shared that they felt confident in declining to answer questions because prior to the interview started, the journalist told them that they were not obliged to answer if they were uncomfortable. Having the open communication about their boundaries in sharing their story was empowering, especially since it was Charlie's first interview.

"I felt in control because [...] I politely declined answering [some questions because] it was too sensitive and […] I would be giving out too much information [about the sexual abuse]." – Charlie

Following on from this, the participants that had been interviewing for a long time leaned on their years of experience in advocating for themselves. They did this by being firm in refusing to answer uncomfortable questions. This was reflective of the introspective skills developed by participants the more they were interviewed and as they were on their healing journey. This allowed participants to notice when they needed to stop sharing, what was not

relevant to the interview and their personal aims they wanted to communicate (see Sub-Theme 1.2).

"…it's about, am I happy to communicate what I'm communicating and if I'm not, then I've gotta stop and just say, listen, this is too much now. But that's very difficult for a survivor if they don't feel, you know, supported." – George

From the quotes by George and Charlie, there is acknowledgement that if the journalist does not facilitate the space to navigate their boundaries by declining questions, it is easy for survivors to give information they may regret later.

Support from others that understand

Five participants spoke about the knowledge and support they got from fellow survivors or media support organisations (support organisations that help those speaking to the media). Participants highlighted that they initially did not understand that they could say 'no' to journalists or ask questions about the interviewing process. Ally shared that they initially thought that they owed their story to journalists but the support organisation they were in touch with encouraged them to take back control. Without the support and training from these organisations, Ally would have gone "in blind" to the process.

"…when I first was approached by the media, I felt I owed them something. They're doing me this great favour of giving me a voice, but [the media support organisation] taught me, no, no, no. You're in the driving seat […] take back control, if you don't like something you say no. We practiced saying I don't want to answer that…" – Ally

Similarly, George referred to media support organisations offering support around navigating the fast-paced process of interacting with journalists. Penny echoed this and shared that the media support organisation liaised with the journalists around the aims of the interview and managed the technical aspects of the interview. This allowed Penny space to "take better care of my emotional wellbeing" which may have been difficult if they were worrying about

the technicalities of the interview. Interviewing can have a significant emotional and mental toll on survivors. Therefore, having one less aspect of the interview to consider was beneficial.

"[Survivor organisations] are very engaging, very helpful before, during and after with…where am I on this journey? What expectations do I have? What expectations do they have to meet their producers needs and are they gonna meet in the middle somewhere." – George

"…knowing there was someone there who had my back and who was called on my side who was on my team […] As a journalist might be more focused on the story angle […] I got to focus more on saying what I was saying…" – Penny

Alongside managing the practical elements of the interviews, George and Penny appreciated that these organisations were on the survivors' side; they had the survivor's best interest at heart. There was a sense that participants were able to fully trust media support organisations since their main goal was to ensure that the survivor felt comfortable. The participants that were supported by these organisations had previous experience of interacting with them prior to interviews which helped to develop this trusting relationship.

Alongside this, three of the five participants referred to the importance of collective action in managing interviews. An essential source of support was being inspired by survivors that previously interviewed. Survivors referred to having a space to talk about difficult aspects of their healing journey that only other survivors would understand. Being interviewed can be an isolating process, that could replicate the silencing and loneliness felt after sexual abuse. However, participants that had a good support network of survivors around them shared that this felt "nurturing" (Emma) and partaking in interviews were easier due to having a space to offload.

"…the whole thing of being a survivor is […] a loneliness feeling. You're the only person on the planet, you're the only victim in the family. You can't tell anybody. It's the loneliest place

in the world to be a child, and you can't tell anybody. And when you bring these people together, […] we'd happily spend all day listening to everybody else […] because we know how they feel." - Lesley

Theme 3 – Challenges faced in the interview process

The third theme explores the practical and emotional struggles participants had before, during and after interviews with journalists. Participants found that retelling their stories were naturally difficult which meant they had to use some coping strategies to manage the impact of interviewing (Sub-Theme 3.1). This was irrespective of what journalists intentionally did. However, the combination of not being understood by journalists (Sub-Theme 3.2) and interactions with journalists feeling like a business transaction (Sub-Theme 3.3), often led to feeling reabused, used for their story and disposable. This was exacerbated by participants being faced with silence after sharing their stories with journalists and uninformed about whether the story would be published (Sub-Theme 3.4).

The psychological toll of speaking out

Participants recounted the difficulties they had when retelling their story of sexual abuse. Lily, for instance, highlighted the difficulty survivors could have when being interviewed by journalists with similar characteristics to the perpetrator. In Lily's case, both the perpetrator and the journalist from their first interview were men. The participant therefore experienced intense distrust, to the extent that they feared the perpetrator may have set up the interview to trap them. This is particularly relevant since those speaking out publicly for the first time may not be aware of their needs and what they can ask for, which could make it harder for journalists to address their needs too. Thus, the significance of individual preferences and boundaries being recognised through training by media support organisations (previously explored in Sub-Theme 2.2) and ways this could shape interview experiences, is once again underlined.

"...I think the problem was that [...] it was a man. And I have been hurt by a man [...] there was this cloud of fear all over me. And at first, like I had the thoughts running through my mind [...] what if it is the same person that hurt me that has set this up?" – Lily

George shared ways they were dissociating during an interview. Their inability to connect to the questions being asked brings into question the survivor's ability to fully consent to what they are being asked to share in moments of dissociation. As survivors shared in Sub-Theme 2.1, they want to have the freedom to refuse to answer questions if they believe they will be sharing more than they are comfortable to share. However, if they are losing their consciousness, it may be difficult to refuse to answer a question. George shared that they appreciated when the journalist noticed they were not present and offered a break.

"...there were times where I could feel my consciousness slipping [...] not really being present [...] I wouldn't dig it into my finger in order to hurt myself, but it would make me more physically aware of my body as opposed to just being so consumed with it up [in my head] and not really connecting to what the question is." – George

William shared that they also experienced dissociation, mainly in the form of time slowing down when being asked questions. They stated that the journalist encouraged them to talk about topics unrelated to the sexual abuse which helped them tackle this symptom and encouraged them to reconnect with their environment. This encounter yet again portrays the importance of journalists being flexible; whether that is by rescheduling interviews, taking a break or speaking about unrelated topics to help survivors reconnect during the interview.

"... we had to reschedule and sometimes we actually didn't talk directly on the whole situation, we had a random discussion and later down, we will come back [to the original conversation]" - William

Prior to the following quote, Florence mentioned that their trial was publicised and reading the various sensationalised headlines were difficult since it reminded them that the

public now knew about the details of the sexual abuse. Although Florence mentioned that there were huge differences between the person they were when they reported the sexual abuse and the person they are now, it is important to mention that there were aspects of the sexual abuse that they still had a physical reaction to.

"There were certain things that I still can't say because I think I'll throw up if I do […] and I can't say them to anybody and I can't even say them to myself. That's why you dissociate, because you just can't. I'm doing it now thinking about it…"– Florence

Florence was unable to explain more about this experience and moved onto explain another aspect of their interviews. Dissociating can feel uncomfortable and lead to a lack of control particularly around the inability to keep track of what is being said. Florence's response to moving onto a manageable part of their story as opposed to their painful memories, reinforces a survivor's need to stay in control and the importance of checking their needs and preferences throughout interviews to develop trust.

Moving onto the aftermath of interviews, participants spoke about the assumption that they may look okay when sharing their stories. However, the reality of their struggles and the ways they manage these struggles after interviews were not seen easily by others.

Lesley stated that they managed the aftereffects by putting on a mask and pretending they were okay, which did not help when trying to heal. Lesley gave an example of their preference to have therapy at home as this reduces the length of time they keep their mask on and they can just curl up in bed after. Therefore, there was a preference to have the option to join interviews online so survivors can spend time recovering from the aftermath of the interviews.

"I just feel vulnerable. Weak. Emotional pain. Small. Fragile. Sad. Hurt. Wounded. And somehow I have to come back from that weak place to get back in the car and drive or function again, you know, when the interview ends." - Lesley

Many participants shared that they benefited from therapeutic support and advocated for other survivors to engage in therapy too. Rose shared that when their memories from the sexual abuse returned, they attended therapy and "realised I'm not what they did". In order to manage the discomfort experienced by retelling their stories, participants found it beneficial when they were offered to have the interviews at home as it helped them regulate their emotions through various techniques they learned along their healing journey: "have a bit of space and walk around […] shaking the limbs to stay nice and relaxed" (Penny).

Similarly, participants shared that there were various ways that they masked or avoided their emotions after interviews. For example, using alcohol was referred to an "anaesthetic" (George) suggesting that it can have a numbing effect or a way to bury the memories of and the negative emotions associated with the sexual abuse. George also attempted to avoid their emotional responses by listening to their interviews away from home.

"...I'm more likely to control my emotional response in a public place. It's that way of like, avoiding the emotions again." – George

Unlike Lesley and George who openly reflected on their past masking behaviours, Lee initially avoided any mention of psychological struggles or coping strategies in their response. They expressed not being affected by speaking about their story. However, they soon enough reflected on their use of alcohol and shared that they told other survivors to "look after yourself. But I never looked after myself".

"I've always felt able to talk about stuff without it affecting me too much. Although […] I've always used alcohol to kind of kill the pain if you like, and so there's always been that risk when I do stuff with the media that I would then leave and then go home and drink two bottles of wine." – Lee

Finally, one participant shared the conflict they had between wanting to speak out for others but being retraumatised every time they shared their story. Throughout their interview

for this study, Emma shared that they were questioning the societal impact their journalistic interviews were making. This made them wonder if it was worth continuing to talk about their story due to the negative consequences this was having on their wellbeing. This is a contrast to the quotes from Sub-Theme 1.1 and 1.2 where survivors shared a healing experience of speaking out and a continued motivation to help others by speaking out. This survivor was the only one to share that speaking out was having an overwhelmingly negative impact on their healing journey, conveying the importance of acknowledging individual differences in how every survivor experiences life after sexual abuse.

"It probably hasn't helped at all with my healing journey because it kind of keeps me stuck […] it's almost like putting yourself through more trauma just to try and make it less traumatic for other people…" – Emma

This dissatisfaction with the societal impact their interviews were having may be linked to the expectations the survivors had from the interviews. Particularly when there are different expectations of speaking out to motivate other survivors to speak out or aiming to reach out to those in power to encourage a change in legislation. Emma found it frustrating when their interviews were not reaching those in power.

Some participants referenced that although the difficulties they experienced during and after being interviewed were normal as they were retelling their stories, they did not feel that there were proper checks in place to ensure that they were "well enough to tell the story" (Sarah).

A lack of understanding from journalists

Participants described some of their interactions with journalists who did not fully understand or put in the effort to understand their experiences.

"[the journalist] just didn't understand the emotional, psychological damage of sexual abuse. Well, if you don't understand it, don't interview someone about it [...] I expect some empathy

to that extent, but not the dismissiveness of like […] so life improved [after they stopped using their unhelpful coping strategies] ….” – George

This assumption felt dismissive of how reducing the use of unhelpful coping strategies can be extremely difficult for survivors. When these assumptions are made, survivors take on additional responsibility to ensure that the survivors in the audience are not being offered “false promises” (George) about recovery being an easy journey.

Additionally, journalists can add elements of surprise when interviewing people to attract more views. A frequently sought means to achieve this is by interviewing two people from opposing beliefs together. However, when journalists use their power in unexpected ways with survivors, such as bringing another person to an interview without informing the survivor, it can be a re-enactment the dynamics of power and control exerted by abusers. Hence, as is indicated by Lee’s feelings of betrayal and confusion upon finding themselves in this situation, survivors can feel silenced and exploited when journalists chose such an approach.

“Control is a really…crucial word because…my experience was that as a child, I was powerless[…] [the abuser] had huge power and control over me […] so when I had these kind of difficult [journalistic] encounters [of a topic in interview being sprung onto me] that tapped into my feeling of powerlessness…because I felt reabused […] I suppose it was because [the media and journalist] wanted to make it a sensational thing…” – Lee

Although only one participant shared this experience, it is crucial to consider since it may be that journalists are unaware of how much of a negative impact this can have on a survivor. As discussed in Sub-Theme 3.1, survivors can have ways of masking during interviews which may make it seem that survivors are able to manage these situations with no consequences. However, many have stated that they will usually experience a wave of emotions and memories after the interviews, once they are in a safe space.

Further parallels drawn between participants' experiences with journalists and abusers surrounded anonymity and being silenced. In particular, participants explained that various journalists assumed that they wanted to be anonymised. Participants stressed how these approaches of journalists reinforce views that survivors are ashamed to show their faces when sharing their stories.

"[they said the interview does not need to show my face], the message that gives out is that I'm still deeply ashamed, that I'm scared to show my face […] the people in the shadows were the paedophiles […] I've got nothing to be ashamed of…" – George

"…to be doing my interview and to know that it's not me. I can't get my voice across and it's going to be actor-voiced over […] it's so insulting" - Lesley

Despite the awareness that not all journalists are intentionally reinforcing a victim-blaming narrative, the suggestion or requirement that they will be anonymous was difficult. It communicated across the idea to participants that no matter how empowered they are to speak out, they are still being silenced by the abusers. Lesley likened this to the abuser having "almighty power" since they felt that media organisations wanted anonymity to avoid being sued. Even though journalists can be constrained by their legal team, participants just wanted open communication (see Theme 4), flexibility (see Sub-Theme 2.1) and collaboration (see Theme 2) to allow survivors to explain the impact this has on them.

The one-sided business transaction of survivor stories

This sub-theme accounts for references to survivors being expected to offer more than just their story, including their time, the true aspects of their stories and their pictures. Two participants felt that their needs were overlooked when journalists did not inform them about the restrictions of a copyright over their personal pictures. The pictures included both those taken specifically for an article but also childhood pictures obtained from survivors. Although

two participants only referred to this, it was a surprising finding that the researcher was not aware of. It may be that other participants have similar experienced but since this was not a prompt in the interviews, they were not asked about this directly.

Both survivors shared that there were only brief conversations with journalists around copyright over their pictures. Hence, the participants were left with questions around their ability to use the pictures when doing their own online advocacy. Many participants described feeling silenced by those in positions of power (see Theme 2.2). Therefore, the lack of clarity about which pictures were copyrighted (whether it was only the ones that were used in the final article or all of the ones the journalist obtained) yet again reflects being silenced by and a distrust of those in power.

"I've handed over copyright of all my pictures to a newspaper [in my first interview] I'm sure they wouldn't even mind if I use them […] they could say, you know, we've only got copyright of the ones we've used […] or we have copyright of all the pictures […] they've just made it really easy for themselves" – Ally

This system appeared to only benefit the journalist and the media company, whilst placing additional burden onto the survivor. Although Ally could have contacted the media company to clarify this, it required a substantial level of emotional effort that would take away from their own time, to regain access to use their childhood pictures. Ally did not have many pictures from their childhood to use, so they experienced regret that they did not have a contract that clearly offered them the freedom to use their own childhood pictures for their advocacy. Furthermore, the effort of reaching out raised questions for Ally around managing the potential rejection of their request.

Similarly, Florence shared that they had pictures taken in their home for the purposes of an article. The media organisation that conducted the interview subsequently charged Florence a fee to use their pictures, as they were now copyrighted. In response to this Florence

felt exploited for their good intention of sharing their story publicly for free. Unlike Ally, Florence did manage to get their photographs without paying for them but they "jumped through all sorts of hoops". The ambiguity around their ability to use their own pictures removed not only their control over their story but also ownership over pictures of themselves.

"[They wanted a fee for one photograph for a limited time] so they're trying to sell me a photograph taken in my home. I've given up my time […] and they wouldn't even let me have a picture. A copy of it." – Florence

Monetary issues that the survivors faced were not limited to copyright laws. Participants also referred to a lack of compensation for their time and the value of their lived experiences. For example, Ally mentions that "they will pay everybody else" but will ask survivors to open up wounds, be vulnerable and manage their emotional distress for free.

Several participants in this sub-theme noted being self-employed or having to take time off work to speak to journalists without pay. Although participants' primary motivation to speak out was not financial (see Theme 1), acknowledging the emotional burden (see Sub-Theme 3.1 and 3.2) and potential loss of income during this, makes monetary compensation a noteworthy element of interviewing. It was striking to see the juxtaposition of survivors sharing their story to raise awareness, while their interactions with journalists felt like a business transaction.

"…I've never been paid a penny for any of this, but all these commercial organisations are making a living out of it. And they're not acknowledging it…" – Florence

"…it's very much just a business transaction of my story" – Sarah

Although they were paid for their time in participating in the current research project, the majority of the participants said that they did not expect to be paid due to their previous experiences with journalists.

Another manifestation of the one-sided business transaction was the sensationalised versions of survivor stories that were published. Ally was given a false sense of choice when they were asked to provide suggestions on an article written about their interview. However, the original version of this article was eventually printed with no consideration of their suggestions. This had legal repercussions for Ally. This inconsistency in asking survivors for feedback but not considering it puts the message across to the survivor that the journalists and their legal team know more about the survivor's story and have more power than the survivor. This undermines the purpose of speaking to survivors about their lived experience, because even though their testimony is not formal evidence, it is their truth and their personal evidence of the sexual abuse.

"…they promised that once they've written the article, they'd send it to me to check […] so I changed it, sent it back, but then they printed the original version anyway […] they've got their own lawyers who decide what's printed or not […] I think they were putting their needs above mine…." – Ally

Five survivors spoke about the internal conflict they experienced when they read such versions of their stories. Participants and their desire to be heard felt used to bring in money to media organisations.

"We want to be heard. I think we're easy prey for journalists to print scandal news and make money on us." – Lesley

There was a sense that journalists were eager for highly dramatic stories with no clarity on what this meant, apart from a perceived interest for graphic details of the sexual abuse. For example, George shared that when they mentioned the word "penetration" the journalist seemed more interested. This gave the impression that there was a hierarchy of abuse and journalists were looking for "who is the most screwed up or […] broken by it". Survivors shared times throughout their healing journey where their stories were either doubted by others

or themselves. Therefore, the fact that journalists dissected survivors' stories based on what benefited them felt like another layer of scrutiny of the sexual abuse. Thus, some participants were left with more self-doubt about their story instead of the power they originally wanted.

"…some journalists can be quite hardcore and they're just after a big story and quite ruthless […] they want all the gory details. [The journalists] kind of lost interest [because my friend did not want to share the details of the sexual abuse]. They wanted […] shock, horror kind of stuff"– Emma

"It's like you need to have the best, worst, terrible story and then they'll bite. It's around being the right person, right time, right story. And if you're not of interest, they'll just ignore you." – Sarah

On the other hand, Rose and Penny shared that they struggled to read the sensationalised versions of their stories in articles after their earlier interviews. Nevertheless, with the passing of time, Rose noticed that their interpretation that the headlines were inaccurate in the portrayal of their story and victim-blaming was not what the audience thought. Rather, journalists had written articles using a language that would capture the attention of their audience. This realisation was a pivotal point of their healing journey to regain power and control.

"…I guess that was maybe part of the shame. The sensationalist headlines. You know, the shaming me, or cheapening [my experience] or […] was I to blame? Was it rape culture? No, it's just where you're at in yourself. This is how they sell…"– Rose

Penny had similar experiences and eventually concluded that reaching out to the journalists requesting changes to the headlines would be effortful. This was reminiscent of a cost benefit analysis for Penny about whether the emotional cost of sharing more of their story for adjustments to the article was worth it for them. Penny referred to this as "my story in italics".

"I have to tell them more about my personal story for them to tweak words in a headline, and it's not worth the emotional cost to get that tiny adjustment that they might end up not making any way because actually that's kind of close enough to the truth. It's not misleading. It's not inaccurate…it's just not how I talk about my life." - Penny

"Ghosted by journalists": The impact of being ignored

In this sub-theme there are references to a lack of communication from journalists with survivors. Participants shared times when journalists planned to have an interview but never contacted them on the day. These encounters reflect a lack of appreciation for the lengths survivors must go to have privacy and manage their anxieties prior to being interviewed. Such experiences and subsequent worries regarding potentially being ignored after making follow-up communications, is likely to impact survivor's sense of control over their voice, and healing. Participants felt that it was their responsibility to adapt to the ways that journalists work by developing "a hard skin and not take it too personally" (Emma). This responsibility can then manifest in the survivor blaming themselves for being impacted by the silence from journalists.

"…a journalist said she'd contact me after lunch and didn't […] I don't know what the best way to respond or react when that does happen, whether it is to send a message […] or whether that will just prompt another being ignored…" – Emma

Participants spoke about their experiences of spending a substantial amount of time telling their story to journalists. Later down the line, the participants either faced complete silence from the journalists or were informed that the articles were not going to be published. This was frustrating for survivors given that they spent time mentally preparing for upcoming interviews. This reflects the unseen effort survivors may go through prior to interviews. Being interviewed about sexual abuse is not just repeating their story but adapting their story to fit with the aims of the interview and working collaboratively with journalists to do this (see

Theme 2). Thus, participants interpreted the ghosting behaviour of journalists as disrespectful and taking advantage of the time they set aside to share their stories.

"...I spoke to a journalist for about half an hour [...] she told me [...] what the aim of the [interview piece] was so I spent two weeks thinking, how can my experience fit into this? What parts of it do I fit the narrative [...] I want to tell people exactly what's happened, but I don't want to name individuals [...] so in my head I'm doing the gardening, thinking I'll say this and this [...] then over time, you don't hear anything..." – Ally

Similarly, participants spent long periods of time sharing their story only for it not to be published. They felt like they were a way for journalists to reach their goal of publishing a great story but ultimately their stories were just "not juicy enough" (Emma; see Sub-Theme 3.3). For a survivor that reached a point in their healing journey where they wanted to share their story, not hearing back at all from journalists left Sarah feeling "like you're not human […] you're just a story that was not relevant for them…". Theme 1.1 explored participants' want to be heard after years of silence. However, after finally receiving the space to use their voices, being ghosted by journalists paralleled the emotional abandonment and lack of trust survivors experienced after being sexually abused. Rather than genuinely wanting to hear their story, participants felt that the journalists were throwing away this period of their history. The imagery of Lesley's child self being ran over again is a powerful portrayal of the multiple times they have been let down over the years with no one to share this with. As a result, Lesley has decided not to share their story further with journalists until they have written confirmation that the journalists' legal department will be happy to publish the story. This was Lesley's way of regaining power over the media organisations.

"... telling them all about, you know, 10 years, I was raped on a weekly basis, 10 years, I had no safe home. Nobody to confide to. I was lonely for 10 years. Nobody to talk to and you tell

that story, and then they say oh no, we're not going to publish it. Just put it in the bin. It's like my little child that wasn't rescued is just running under the bus again, you know?"– Lesley

Florence shared similar feelings of being invisible during childhood continuing into adulthood. This lack of closure with the journalist effectively mimicked their earlier relationships in which they were let down by those they expected support from.

"…when you don't get treated with respect like the journalists didn't come back to me…we tell ourselves we are weak and stupid, unloved, and unlovable. That's a stick of rock that we are and we are constantly beating ourselves up and feel valueless because if our parents didn't give a shit about what happened to us, why should anyone else?" - Florence

Theme 4 – "Treat them as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews

The fourth theme conveys suggestions for future interviews offered by the participants to journalists and the media. These quotes build on ideas in earlier Themes and Sub-themes, especially regarding the difficult encounters shared by participants in Theme 3. Participants encountered a lack of understanding from journalists around the impact of speaking about sexual abuse. They shared that there was no expectation that journalists would know how to manage every difficulty survivors experienced in interviews. Nor did participants expect journalists to take on the role of therapists. However, they believed that journalists could be equipped with basic ways of supporting survivors including ways to address their story not being published, developing a relationship with them (Sub-Theme 4.1) and offering post-interview check-in (Sub-Theme 4.2).

Communication is key

Most participants shared a need to be seen as a person before opening up about their story. For example, journalists creating a space that makes survivors feel safe before delving into questions about their vulnerabilities was reported as being essential to getting the most out

of survivors without negatively impacting their emotional wellbeing. The participants advocated for other survivors reclaiming ownership over their stories by asking journalists to "be honest and upfront about what the purpose of the article is" (Cara).

"…try to know the person. Create this relationship […] once the person […] believes that yes I am safe with this person [...] you will be surprised how free and how in depth the conversation will be..." – Mary

A journalist recognising the difficulties that participants have been through can feel like acceptance. After years of interviewing, Lesley felt this acceptance and empathy in their most recent interview through the warmth and shared emotional connection they felt with the journalist. This was a healing experience, especially because the journalist recognised the struggles their child self went through and offered acceptance.

"My last interview was the most incredible interview in so many ways, because afterwards the interviewer hugged me and we were both sobbing… and I have never done that before. Never. And I just felt such empathy for the little me… This recognition is acceptance. It's beautiful" – Lesley

They also explained that they simply wanted to be informed if an interview was not going ahead rather than being 'ghosted'. In this regard, participants frequently used the words "honest" and "respect", evidencing their need to trust journalists conducting the interviews. Therefore, the first step of developing that safety was to ensure that there is an open line of communication. Communicating honestly with survivors meant that they were not waiting and hoping that their story will be heard.

"It's all about communication…saying I haven't forgotten you... and with the papers deciding not to run this…thanks for telling me and we'll deal with it…treat that person with respect because you are in a position of hurting them…"- Florence

There is reference to journalists being in a position to hurt survivors from Florence's quote. Linked to this view, Sarah referred to a journalist informing them that their interview was not going to be published but promised that they would find another way to work together. However, they did not get back in touch after this. Therefore, whilst journalists may make promises in the hope that survivors feel better about their story not being published, this is false hope. Sarah described recovery as a "minefield" which is suggestive of the inner turmoil survivors can experience, particularly when given hope for a future interview but then receive no follow up.

"…I think it would have just been easier for there to be a bit of honesty of like we can't use your story for whatever reason. Fullstop, because you don't hold on to that hope then…I think that's where the journalists probably have a little bit of a duty of care that when someone is in that state of recovery and that's a minefield, right…And just to get all of their information out of them about an hour and a half of basically trauma resurfacing and then just drop them, that's not really safe." - Sarah

Following on from treating survivors as people, the complex impact of sexual abuse and subsequent healing were topics that the participants did not think were addressed enough.

"…all the regular stuff is still going on in that person's life, there is still bereavement, there is still homework, there is still having to catch the bus in the rain. All these things that make life a bit frustrating, a bit upsetting […] are going on and there's abuse happening as well. So, it's not a simple, clear story." - Penny

Participants believed that alongside the struggles they experienced after the sexual abuse, there was a need to speak about the motivating aspects of healing afterwards. Hence, the public perception of survivors "being in the shadows" (George) gets reinforced and the sense of empowerment survivors aim to gain after speaking out is taken away.

"I think he was more interested in the part of the story of why I haven't done anything or why I didn't do anything for this long. And I just feel like this isn't the point. The point is not what I did or what I didn't do over the years. It's about what I'm doing now." - Elizabeth

Following on from this, participants shared the importance of language when referring to sexual abuse or survivors. Being aware of the underlying meaning that the language they use holds was important for journalists to know. This was a call for journalists to humanise the survivor experience. Cara shared the lifelong impact of sexual abuse, particularly child sexual abuse where someone has not had the chance to emotionally develop. "It is before they've had a chance to mature and grow" (Cara) thus sexual abuse could impact anyone that journalists are interviewing, regardless of whether the interview is about sexual abuse or another topic. Therefore, having the appropriate training can highlight the importance of language especially if journalists understand the ways that sexual abuse effects development of trust, sense of control (see Theme 2) and the difficulties of retelling their story (see Theme 3).

"...we don't talk about historical abuse, we talk about non-recent [...] because it's like whenever the abuse happens, the impacts are still current." - Penny

"language is incredibly important [...] I've heard journalists say, what made you admit you were abused? No, you don't use language like that" – Lee

Despite this, there was acknowledgement that journalists do not know everything regarding the right language to use, since "we all say wrong things so don't be frightened to ask" (Ally).

Offering opportunities for check-ins

Offering no opportunities for a post-interview check-in runs the risk of resurfacing survivors' feelings of "being weak or unloved" (Florence), or "being used" (Cara) after the sexual abuse. Additionally, Sarah mentioned the possibility that opening up about their story during their earlier interviews could have "triggered" their suicidality, which was prominent at

the time. Having someone checking in on them after sharing their story and determining whether they had a "support system in place" (Sarah), were essential for participants.

"Making sure that you don't just get information and go away and then we have to deal with it but making sure that we will be fine after you're gone..." - Lily

Even though speaking out about their story can be a way of being heard, there is an anticipated mental toll of retelling sexual abuse stories on survivors, as explored in Sub-Theme 3.1. Thus, providing support to everyone can ensure that even those survivors that look 'okay' during interviews have the contact details for further support if they notice any post-interview impact. Alongside mitigating this, since most survivors shared that they speak out for the greater good, signposting can minimise the pressure survivors feel around ensuring that their story helps other survivors and normalise seeking the support they need.

"...you don't want survivors to have to carry that burden of what they're saying, how it's gonna affect them, how it's gonna affect others. Like wrapping in further support can just really help them focus on what they need." - Penny

Arranging check-ins did not only have to be post-interview, two participants shared that it is essential to offer survivors with as much information about the interview process as possible and get information about their needs prior to the interviews. They suggested that this could be a quick checklist of aspects of survivor preferences they can check. This indicated their awareness of the practical constraints journalists may face and attempted to offer alternative ways to ensure journalists and survivors can feel comfortable during interviews.

"maybe they could do some kind of checklist that they could, you know check do they want to be named, do they want their photo, what are they happy to share? What do they not want to be asked? [...] are they feeling safe? Do they need support? – Rose

"being able to discuss questions beforehand can be good… not just the questions, but like the structure and it can be really like this is what the room's gonna look like […] who the people

are […] like all those kind of logistical things […] that stuff can end up being really easy and just makes everything run a bit smoother. – Penny

Chapter four: Discussion

Overview

This study investigated the experiences of a group of sexual abuse survivors interviewed by journalists in the UK. Specific questions of interest were: 1) What are the motivators of speaking out to journalists for sexual abuse survivors? 2) What was the perceived impact of being interviewed by journalists on sexual abuse survivors? 3) What would sexual abuse survivors want to be different in future interviews with journalists? The reflexive thematic analysis of 15 interviews with sexual abuse survivors generated four main themes: Interviews create purpose and empowerment, An act of collaboration, Challenges faced in the interview process and "Treat them as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews.

Findings of this study are consistent with existing literature around trauma survivors' experiences of being interviewed by journalists (Cherry, 2021; Forsberg, 2019). Concepts of powerlessness and a need to be in control were present across all themes (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012; Finkelhor & Brown, 1985). Additionally, the findings of the current study (specifically theme one) found that similar to the themes from the systematic review, the motivation survivors had to speak out was mainly for personal healing and to benefit other survivors (Campbell et al., 2010; Foster & Minwalla, 2018; Kirchner & Niederkrotenthaler, 2024). Following on from the themes and the line of argument synthesis highlighted from the systematic review, the findings of the thematic analysis demonstrated that the context of speaking out is important for survivors, specifically impacting how comfortable they feel to share more about their story.

Participants expressed their views on the benefits of speaking to journalists (for personal healing and speaking out for other survivors) alongside the costs they endure due to this. They shared that despite the benefits of speaking to journalists, they have experienced

silence from journalists or sensationalised versions of their stories. In terms of the cost of speaking to journalists, the current study went beyond previous literature by gaining insight into the views of sexual abuse survivors on having their pictures copyrighted, not hearing back from journalists and the importance of collaboration. Such novel findings will undoubtedly be valuable in informing journalistic practices when interacting with sexual abuse survivors. However, one previously identified recommendation that also emerged from the present study is a need to follow the guidance that has been developed for journalists interviewing survivors (NSVRC, n.d.; Quigley, 2023; Samaritans, 2020).

Alongside this, the parallels between the researcher's role (as a researcher and mental health practitioner) and the role of journalists were considered, particularly the power dynamics involved in their interactions with survivors. The researchers' reflections throughout the project revealed that their expectations of how journalists should engage with survivors were impacted by a lack of consideration of the systemic pressures faced by journalists. The majority of the survivors that participated in the study shared nuanced perspectives about their struggles when interacting with journalists whilst acknowledging that journalists work within systems with expectations or targets that shape their practice.

The following chapter will examine these themes with respect to existing literature. Consideration will also be given to the implications of the findings for journalism and clinical psychology. Given that the fourth identified theme examines suggestions from survivors on improving journalistic practice, it will be embedded into these implications. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed, and future research recommendations will be given.

Interviews create purpose and empowerment

This theme summarised the personal and relational motivators to speaking out about sexual abuse stories. After maintaining their silence or being silenced since the sexual abuse

by family or institutions that harmed them, most participants reported that the main reason for interacting with journalists was that it was liberating to be heard. The participants referred to being listened to and taking back control, neither of which happened during the sexual abuse or with the criminal justice system afterwards. Literature on the healing journey of sexual abuse survivors emphasises having their sense of control taken away from them, regardless of the length of time since the abuse (Delker et al., 2020). Moreover, participants were aware that speaking out was the right decision for their personal growth despite the difficulties associated with retelling their story. Once again this finding is in line with research conveying that speaking out about sexual abuse can be empowering (Strauss Swanson & Szymanski, 2020), whilst simultaneously instigating growth and severe distress for survivors (Barker et al., 2023; Hartley et al., 2016). The aforementioned findings point to the suggestion of Trauma-Informed Journalism (TIJ) that journalists need to understand the potential impact of sexual abuse and finally speaking out, in order to acknowledge individual differences in the importance placed on being heard (Quigley, 2023).

It is important to consider who the survivors are seeking to hear them. Being heard held different meanings for each participant in this study and their reflections varied based on their personal growth since the sexual abuse. For the participants, being heard involved being understood by their family or the public, seeking justice and creating social change. Survivors' experiences of empowerment after interviews depended largely on how their stories were received and whether their sense of agency was restored, which participants highlighted as important when they first spoke to journalists. However, when collective action or change did not happen or was not possible, this led to disappointment. The systematic review conducted as part of this research project shared similarities with this theme. It found that trauma survivors often speak publicly about their experiences in order to build resources that may be beneficial for their own healing, raise public awareness or support other survivors. Despite the emotional

difficulties associated with sharing their story, survivors shared that having understanding relationships and supportive societal responses can encourage personal healing. This aligns with the claim of the Socio-Interpersonal Model (SIM; Maercker and Horn, 2013). This model can be a framework to understand this complex relationship to being heard. The model recognises that individuals are situated within interconnected contexts that have the potential to mitigate or intensify individual experiences of traumatic stress or healing.

Survivors referred to an initial need to have their voices heard and a social responsibility to help other individuals via their own story. This is in line with previous research around survivors reconstructing their identity and influencing the sexual abuse narrative whilst helping other survivors through their personal stories (Gueta et al., 2020). However, over time individuals noticed that speaking out had fulfilled their initial desire to be heard and was now preventing them from keeping boundaries in place and resting. These viewpoints imply that for some survivors, there is a desire to move beyond the victimised identity and reassert control. Thus, survivors could decide to partake in an interview with a journalist if it met their terms or refuse to speak out anymore. This shift in a need speak out may even be a sign of healing for survivors. Considered through the Ecological Systems Model (ESM) lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Stockman et al., 2023), this can be explained through the chronosystem which emphasises ways an individual and their environment can change over time, thereby impacting individual development. This can include change through growth, time since sexual abuse and acceptance over time from the survivors themselves or others. Some participants in this study redefined what survivor advocacy meant to them over time, moving away from the need to speak out at any opportunity to focusing on their own needs and what the public needs to hear. Moreover, as time elapsed and healing progressed, participants' perspectives on being interviewed by journalists changed. They mentioned feeling more comfortable with who they were, believing their own story, and having more support around them, including therapy.

Therefore, they no longer felt a need to be heard to heal but speaking out became a choice powered by self-agency. This parallels the finding that survivors work through developing meaning after sexual abuse with the help of their relationships, professional support and with the passage of time since the abuse (Draucker et al., 2011, Domhardt et al., 2015; Jeong & Cha, 2019).

Similarly, Draucker et al. (2011) found that alongside developing a survivor identity, it is important for survivors to pass on their personal experiences to other survivors and the public by joining organisations or speaking about the abuse publicly. Their study emphasised that hearing messages on TV, public talks or in other domains about healing journeys enabled the audience (participants in the study) to reconsider assumptions of sexual abuse and self-blame. Participants in the current study reported that they had very specific aims of ensuring others did not feel alone after sexual abuse through openly sharing the realities of the progress and setbacks involved in healing. This is not unique to being interviewed by journalists since similar findings have been previously found with sexual abuse survivors sharing their stories online (Alaggia & Wang, 2020) and in public inquiries (Hamber & Lundy, 2020; Barker et al., 2023).

Sharing their stories for the benefit of the general public was especially motivating for individuals when it came to raising awareness of underrepresented groups, including male sexual abuse survivors. As noted earlier, male survivors are more reluctant to disclose or speak out about sexual abuse than female survivors (London et al., 2008). Reasons for this include male survivors questioning their sexuality or masculinity following abuse, and the social expectation that males exhibit sexualised behaviour (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Godier-McBard & Jones, 2020). Stories of female identifying individuals therefore dominate sexual abuse narratives online, in the media, in healthcare (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Gallagher et al., 2019; Munro-Kramer et al., 2017) and in the current study. This highlights that in order to

encourage more male identifying survivors to speak out, journalists need to acknowledge the distinct impacts of sexual abuse on this group and their subsequent needs when being interviewed. Since exploring gender differences was not the aim of this research and only one male survivors explicitly mentioned this, this will be explored further in the strengths and limitations section.

Overall, this theme highlights survivors' need for safe spaces after sexual abuse and their desire to ensure other survivors do not suffer like they did. For many participants, reclaiming control and power over their stories was important for their recovery, although their understanding of control and power changed over time. As more time passed since the sexual abuse, some participants noticed a shift in their boundaries. Some participants shared frustrations when their stories were changed due to editorial expectations or when they were met with silence from journalists. Despite their wish to maintain power and control over how their stories were heard and portrayed, they were not always granted this and their sense of agency was undermined.

An act of collaboration

This theme explored the ways in which participants gradually felt a sense of control and power during interviews through collective action: whether this was with journalists, media support organisations or fellow survivors. Linked to the previous theme in which survivors had aims when speaking out publicly, individuals in the present research expressed that working together with journalists on their stories with a mutual goal was beneficial.

Moreover, literature emphasises the importance of survivors having control over the narrative of their experiences in order to promote psychological integration and minimise the risk of retraumatisation in the long-term (Delker et al., 2020; Forsberg, 2019; Glad et al., 2017; Maercker & Mehr, 2006; Walsh-Chiders et al., 2011). In the systematic review conducted as part of this research, it was found that context in which survivors shared their trauma stories

was important for their experience of control. For instance, in one of the studies in the systematic review, survivors that participated in a public inquiry felt a lack of control and safety when their testimonies were not valued and the location was suddenly changed to an inappropriate one (Hamber & Lundy, 2020). However, survivors felt comfortable when they were offered dedicated time and their individual needs were considered during The Truth Project that aimed to hear survivor experiences after a public inquiry (Barker et al., 2023). Similarly, participants from the current study acknowledged that although interviewing is a journalist's job, they appreciated and connected with those that made them feel part of the interview process and had a genuine interest in their story. These journalists led trusting relationships with survivors by ensuring individuals felt in control of their narratives; both in terms of the sexual abuse experiences and survivors' desire to raise awareness. This supports the view that trauma recovery exists in stages (Herman, 2002), in that after feeling safe and retelling their stories, survivors can benefit from reconnecting with others. The aforementioned findings are in line with existing literature regarding trust and control (Maltas, 1996; Montgomery et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the flexibility of journalists surrounding practical elements of interviews (the time of day, location and mode of contact such as online, face to face or over the phone) was important for participants. Providing them a sense of safety and certainty on interview details ensured that survivors were able to emotionally prepare for interviews, be comfortable retelling their stories during the process, and finally have the space to experience the unavoidable post-interview distress. This supports previous literature around what survivors may need to manage the difficulties of healing after trauma, including safety, stability and ensuring survivors have access to ways of managing their symptoms (Herman, 1992; Van der Kolk, 2014). Similar to Forsberg's (2019) finding, participants in this study who were offered a specific interview time and started to mentally prepare for it, felt abandoned and disrespected

when the journalist stopped communicating. Since safety, predictability and dependability are absent during sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1987), demonstrating strong interpersonal skills by creating non-judgemental spaces fostering these aspects instils hope and trust into the survivor. Journalists demonstrating flexibility on the practical aspects of interviews suggests a Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA) which is a much-needed stance in the long-term to continue prioritising the well-being of all survivors.

For the participants of this research, speaking to journalists had two distinct yet positive influences on their experience. Collaborative and flexible journalists were pathways for survivors to connect with other survivor advocates or those in the audience. Survivor advocates (such as those online or from media support organisations) at times also played a key role in facilitating smoother and more supportive interactions with journalists. The participants that were linked in with media support organisations prior to speaking to journalists were aware of their boundaries and had training on how to say no to answers. This contributed to the development of their interpersonal safety (Herman, 2002) by establishing a supportive exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). As suggested by literature applying the ESM to the experiences of sexual abuse survivors, less stigmatised references to sexual abuse by others, availability of more resources and safe spaces created by others can facilitate personal healing and ease the emotional burden associated with speaking out about sexual abuse (Zinzow et al., 2022). Collaboration and choice, which are two of the six principles for offering TIA (Sweeney & Taggart, 2018), were easier to establish when participants in this study interacted with media support organisations or journalists that understood their trauma, similar to the findings of the study by Kirkner et al. (2021). Recognition of their sexual abuse experiences and encouragement to reclaim control from those that understood, reduced survivors' shame and their sense of obligation to express gratitude towards journalists who were platforming their stories. This supports the SIM (Maercker & Hecker, 2016) in that positive social

acknowledgement of trauma experiences can lead to better psychological wellbeing, strengthened relationships and integration to their community (Carranza & Bueno-Guerra, 2025; Lee & Choi, 2024).

Overall, a collaborative focus can disrupt the typical power imbalance between survivors and journalists (Bloom, 2006). Such imbalance can mirror the power dynamics between survivors and perpetrators. Without collective action, it can be argued that speaking out about sexual abuse may feel like an individual battle. When this occurs, it can be detrimental to the survivor's mental health, healing journey and impact their engagement with speaking out in the future (Cherry, 2021).

Challenges faced in the interview process

This theme summarised the negative impact of being interviewed by journalists. Trauma symptoms are experienced when a survivor relives the event through retelling their story, as well as just after a traumatic event (Herman, 1992; Van der Kolk, 2014). Previous research found that retelling stories of sexual abuse can leave survivors in emotional pain (Foster & Minwalla, 2018). Managing this pain on their own can leave survivors feeling shame, including feeling unloved, unlovable and dispensable (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). Participants in this study used various maladaptive coping strategies to manage the psychological distress of speaking out. For example, substance misuse, self-criticism and avoidance. One participant shared that they found digging their nail into their finger helps to feel physically aware of their body when they were dissociating. Previous research has found that the aforementioned coping strategies used by survivors are often hidden from the public eye (Chapman et al., 2006; Favazza, 1996; Panzer & Viljoen, 2004; Schmid et al, 2013). This was the case for the participants as often times, they engaged in these coping strategies after the interviews. However, participants gradually developed adaptive coping strategies to help manage the difficulties involved in sharing their story, including doing the interview online, having support

from others (family, friends, other survivors and therapists), pacing whilst being interviewed and asking for written confirmation that their story will be published. Regarding the participant that asked for written confirmation, they adopted this strategy after sharing their story multiple times without a publication and facing silence from journalists. Therefore, findings of this study extend prior knowledge on survivors' use of various coping strategies (Stockman et al., 2023) by exploring the ways that they are used by survivors when speaking out to journalists. Furthermore, this research underlines the need to adopt a 'shame lens' (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022) alongside Trauma Informed Journalism (TIJ) in order to understand and identify subtle signs of discomfort when recalling challenging experiences. This approach can aid journalists in understanding what survivors have to do to cope with emotional distress and post-interview shame whilst considering their own biases or discomfort when reporting on survivor stories. However, due to time constraints, financial pressures and "macho culture" (Cottle, 2003; Allan, 2010), it may be that some journalists do not have the skills or the time to offer this to survivors they interview.

Following on from this, potential biases around sexual abuse held by journalists are important to consider especially in situations where editorial needs were prioritised above the survivor's needs. Participants described this happening when journalists focused on graphic details, despite survivors wanting to focus on their journey since the sexual abuse. Some participants mentioned that such approach to journalism can feel exploitative and reinforce a lack of agency. The power imbalance went beyond the survivor and journalist, as participants felt that their stories were being compared to find the 'worst' stories of sexual abuse, creating an unspoken sense of hierarchy of abuse. This hierarchy of abuse involved journalists seeming more interested in stories with explicit details of sexual abuse (for example, if penetration was involved) despite participants wanting to share more about the ability to heal after sexual abuse. There is the potential that this practice of wanting to publish stories with explicit details of

sexual abuse is reflective of societal norms, the audience expectations and the news values of a newspaper (Cottle, 2003; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). For example, the "macho culture" within journalism, as discussed in the Introduction chapter, emphasises sensationalism and dramatic impact. This can result in stories of sexual abuse being reshaped to align with the newsroom values (Allan, 2010; Steiner, 2017). With the increase in research around TIJ, trauma and the development of guidelines, the ethics of reporting graphic details and sensationalising stories is under scrutiny (Healey, 2022). A sensitive approach in trauma-related reporting can be identified by publications of the Samaritans, in which journalists are discouraged from reporting excessive details about a suicide (Samaritans, 2020). This is to protect the privacy of the person that died and minimise distress that could be experienced by significant others and the general public. Being considerate of how a trauma survivor wants to share their story is also mentioned in the Quigley (2023) TIJ guidelines to interviewing survivors.

Alternatively, sexual abuse survivors in this research expressed a preference for talking about healing, emotional wellbeing and advocacy work during interviews with journalists, instead of in-depth details of their traumas. They believed that the journalists did not understand the impact of trauma and why their aims to focus on healing was important for their own wellbeing and for informing other survivors about their realistic but hopeful healing journey. This is in line with previous research around focusing on the survivor's emotional experience rather than on genitally centred discussions or focusing on why the survivor did not report the abuse (Carranza & Bueno-Guerra, 2025). Furthermore, survivors have no control over what is being done to them during sexual abuse (Chaudhury et al., 2017), a parallel to their experiences of journalists presenting their stories in ways that work for media organisations. This reenactment of powerlessness can be understood through the Traumagenic Dynamics Model (TDM; Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). The dynamic of powerlessness describes how trauma can be reinforced when survivors feel unable to manage what happens to them, even after the sexual

abuse has ended. As explored by the Socio-Interpersonal Model (SIM; Maercker & Horn, 2013) trauma recovery is shaped by internal processes, interpersonal relationships and broader societal views. Thus, survivors may internalise societal narratives around the hierarchy of sexual abuse or the myth of an "ideal victim" (Eelmaa & Murumaa, 2022), leading them to question the legitimacy of their own experiences. This can impact the ways they interpret and manage their own trauma, namely through increased shame or reluctance to speak out further.

Certain individuals expressed confusion around the freedom they had to use their childhood or current pictures that were initially used by journalists to add impact to published stories. The main reason for this was journalists obtaining copyright over these pictures without explicitly informing survivors about restrictions on future usage, such as in participants' online advocacy work. Moreover, individuals can feel disconnected with their external and internal selves or describe their self-identity as underdeveloped following a traumatic event, especially from childhood (Schimmenti & Caretti, 2016). In this regard, one can argue that personal pictures of survivors in the present study represented the core aspects of their identities including childhood memories or the time they offered to the journalists. This would explain why they believed that a lack of transparency about their legal rights was dismissive of their identities, struggles following abuse and the time they offered for the interview. These findings supported the research by Cherry (2021), in which trauma survivors wanted journalists to explain their rights and the journalistic processes. This highlights the need to acknowledge the impact of temporality on survivors' needs, offering support for the chronosystem (changes over time) explored in the ESM (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). For example, a legal matter surrounding the usage of personal content that individuals did not fully understand during early interactions with journalists, may have great importance for them later on in their healing journeys. If such ambiguity is not addressed sensitively and in a timely fashion, then journalists may inadvertently reinforce the lack of voice, autonomy and connection between inner and external

selves experienced by survivors during and after sexual abuse. Support for this view comes from the current study in which one participant was hesitant to use their pictures for advocacy work or get in touch with journalists to confirm whether they can use the pictures. Findings of this research also demonstrate the need to follow TIJ guidelines. Specifically, journalists and even policy makers must recognise ways in which existing copyright practices can bring further psychological harm to trauma survivors. Thus, meaningful changes in legislations can be advocated for.

Developing trust and safety are essential to interpersonal interactions, especially those that involve people sharing deeply personal stories (Herman, 2002; Reeves, 2015; Sweeney and Taggart, 2018). However, this trust was broken for participants of this study when there was an expectation to hear their trauma narratives without reciprocal care or ongoing engagement with the media. This mirrors the potential abandonment survivors experienced from people they most expected support from, and their dismissiveness of the impact of sexual abuse on participants. Considering the TDM (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985), if survivors trust journalists enough to share their stories yet do not hear back from them, this can lead to feelings of betrayal, powerlessness and abandonment (Campbell et al., 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Forsberg, 2019; Pyevich et al., 2003). Moreover, individuals expressed that whilst they were aware of the possibility of their stories being dropped post-interview, they would have appreciated updates from journalists in these cases. The need for clarity has been echoed by survivors of other traumas too, including homicide and traffic accidents (Cherry, 2021). This can reinforce a shame-based response where survivors can feel unlovable or doubt the severity of their own experience (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). Some participants in this study thought they had to develop a hard skin to manage the silence from the journalists. This can mimic the sexual abuse whereby the person is forgotten about once they are no longer needed. From an ethical standpoint, acts of ghosting also contradict TIJ guidelines and knowledge on best journalistic

practice as they emphasise the importance of transparency, trustworthiness and follow-through of any promises (Quigley, 2023; Healey, 2022, p. 161). This is in line with the finding that the ways in which survivors are offered emotional support are as important as the practical support received (Ahrens et al., 2007). It is noteworthy that all of the participants that referred to being ghosted by journalists each had more than four interactions with journalists. Although they were not new to speaking out about their sexual abuse stories, every retelling of their story had the potential to make survivors relive the traumatising event (Barker et al., 2023; Healey, 2022, p. 161). Hence, it should not be assumed that survivors who speak up more are better able to handle the psychological struggles of being ghosted by professionals.

Strengths and limitations

This research project is the first to explore the experiences sexual abuse survivors have with being interviewed by journalists in the UK. Previous research that has explored experiences of being interviewed looked at trauma survivors in general (Cherry, 2021), rather than sexual abuse survivors specifically. Whilst there have been initiatives to create tips around interviews targeted at journalists and survivors, to the researcher's knowledge, there is no research empirically looking at the experiences of sexual abuse survivors. Constraints around timing and funding meant that 15 survivors were interviewed, a total of 33 people had initially registered an interest in participating. This highlights that there is an interest in this area of research and the desire to share knowledge.

During the recruitment phase, there was an encounter with potentially fraudulent participants expressing interest in the study. This became apparent through inconsistencies in their email communication, vague and similar responses to other potentially fraudulent participants. Sensing that these responses were not credible, the researcher discussed this in supervision and carried out a screening call for these individuals prior to booking the interviews. This is unfortunately a common experience in research and becomes an issue when

it leads to the collection of false data and a waste of time and funding that is difficult to obtain at times (Kumarasamy et al., 2024). However, the use of an additional screening call reduced the risk of this as the researcher could ask questions that would highlight relevance to the inclusion criteria. Although it is difficult when researching sexual abuse survivors to ask further questions about how survivors fit into the inclusion criteria, but this approach was needed to ensure that the study was reflective of sexual abuse survivors.

The interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. Naturally, those that had longer interviews provided more data and offered a deeper understanding about their experiences. Those that had been interviewed multiple times had various interviews and journalists they interacted with to draw upon. It may have been beneficial to include additional prompts for the researcher when interviewing participants with less experience in speaking to journalists. This may have encouraged survivors to share more details about their limited, but valuable, experience with journalists.

One limitation of semi-structured interviews is that there are likely to be variation in the order and way questions are asked. However, the interviews also allowed the researcher and participants to build rapport. This allowed for participants to see the researcher, observe their non-verbal behaviours to ascertain if the researcher was engaged in their responses and at times, show the researcher newspaper clippings of their story. The use of this type of interview was a strength as it mimicked TIA by considering individual differences when interviewing people and offered time for the unique aspects of each participant's story. For example, there were some participants that initially shared that they did not have difficult experiences with journalists but as the interview progressed and more questions were asked, they offered more information about their varied experiences. Having some questions and prompts to refer back to during interviews was beneficial for the research and it was less restrictive to allow for additional information participants wanted to offer.

Purposive sampling method was used to recruit survivors that were willing to share their experiences with journalists. This may be a limitation since survivors were recruited based on their willingness to respond to a research advert sent via a mailing list. The sampling method may have underrepresented survivors that may not be willing to talk about the difficult or retraumatising experiences when being interviewed by journalists. However, an important strength was that the study was conducted with individuals that had lived experience of sexual abuse and being interviewed by journalists. As stated previously, many of the survivors were surprised to find out they will be eligible for a £20 voucher, despite this being mentioned in the study poster and information sheet. This suggests that those who participated had a genuine interest in the study since it offered them a space to be heard about their journalistic encounters. They were motivated to take part in this study as it offered them the opportunity for their experiences to inform and shape the growing body of research in this area.

Additionally, the participants that engaged in the study were from a diverse age range, however majority of the participants were White (British or Other) and identified themselves as female. Due to the purposive sampling method and reliance on word of mouth, it is difficult to ensure that the participants' experiences represent the range of experiences of sexual abuse survivors being interviewed by journalists. Whilst qualitative research does not aim for generalisability, it would be beneficial to carry out this research with a diverse sample to capture the stories that were potentially left out. The individual needs during journalistic interviews may be different for male participants or those from racialised, disabled or LGBTQIA+ communities. Previous findings have shown that male sexual abuse survivors may face different stereotypes about their sexuality and survivor identity (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Godier-McBard & Jones, 2020) which may also play out in journalistic encounters due to journalist biases or newsroom culture. Furthermore, although four participants were 'Black/Black British', the limited discussion in the interviews around the impact of

racialisation may have been influenced by the researcher's lack of prompts on this topic. As explored by the SIM (Maercker and Horn, 2013), the specific social environment of an individual can either mitigate or intensify individual experiences of trauma and subsequent healing. Therefore, it is suggested that future research would benefit from exploring the individual needs of these groups during interactions with journalists.

Within this study, survivors were at varying stages of their healing journeys. This may have shaped how they experienced, remembered and interpreted their encounters with journalists. Individual needs, boundaries, memories of events and sense of agency evolve over time (Bronfenbrenner 1976; Herman, 1992). A consideration of time since the sexual abuse and their journalistic encounters impacting the healing process and ultimately what survivors share in research interviews could offer deeper insights. However, the inclusion of participants at varying stages of their healing was a strength of this study as it is reflective of the survivor population. This was beneficial as it offered insight into the ways the interview needs of survivors at different points on their healing journey could be addressed.

Implications

"Treat them as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews

The last theme that emerged was "Treat them as a person, not a story": improving survivor experiences in interviews. As the theme name implies, it covers suggestions made by the participants on how future interviews could be conducted in ways that encourage them to feel as a whole person, not just a story. Survivors highlighted the importance of communication, and making sure that journalists signpost survivors for further support. As suggested by the participants of this study and TIJ guidelines (Cherry, n.d.; Quigley, 2023), open communication allows journalists to understand the individual needs of a survivor. For example, whether survivors would benefit from knowing where the interview will be, offering breaks when needed and being honest about the purposes of the interview, may ease the

pressure on survivors and journalists. Open communication extends to careful consideration of survivors' understanding of the interview process and how trauma symptoms may affect their capacity to give informed consent, similar to the findings from Cherry (2021). Journalists may assume that when survivors are agreeing to speak to journalists, they are giving consent to all aspects of the interview (Healey, 2022 p. 188). However, as mentioned by the participants of this study, factors such as dissociating, limited understanding of contracts and being uninformed about how their stories will be presented, can impact the relevance of the consent provided. Alongside open communication, following up with survivors or signposting them to support services was essential to manage the post-interview shame experienced. Previous research supports this, as survivors had negative experiences with journalists when they did not have a follow-up (Cherry, 2021; Forsberg, 2019).

Theoretical implications

The findings of this research have important theoretical implications for the SIM and TDM. Firstly, the SIM emphasises the importance of social context, interpersonal reactions and broader societal and cultural feedback (Maercker & Horn, 2013). This model can be extended through this research by offering a deeper understanding into how survivor interactions with journalists are important social exchanges that can influence meaning making during the healing process after sexual abuse that span across all three levels of the SIM. Participants in this study described validating and harmful media experiences, which is supported by Forsberg (2019) and Walsh-Childers et al. (2011). Whilst participants spoke about being heard and journalists offering collaborative approaches, others were displaying harmful practice such as not informing the survivor or ignoring them. When survivors were faced with a lack of understanding from journalists or their legal teams, or did not hear back from journalists, this led to social affects including shame, feelings of guilt and abandonment. This suggests that public-facing interactions with the press can have a socio-interpersonal

impact on survivors and the important role media interactions play on survivors' meaning-making processes should be considered.

The TDM (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985) outlined the impact of childhood sexual abuse including dynamics such as trauma sexualisation, powerlessness, betrayal and stigmatisation. The findings of this study offer support for this model as many survivors reported experiencing powerlessness not only during the abuse but also within their interactions with journalists especially when they were not offered information to aid their understanding of the interviewing or legal processes. Some participants also referred to how their experiences with journalists were reminded them of their experiences during child sexual abuse such as not having their story published by journalists, was a reminder of their family not believing them. These findings suggests that encounters with professionals such as journalists, can reproduce traumagenic dynamics that impact healing.

By using insights from both SIM and TDM, this research highlights the need to account for institutional interactions that can support or hinder healing after sexual abuse. Power, control and trust were key factors that either facilitated positive journalistic interactions for survivors or became barriers when they were not present. Both models would benefit from further exploration around the role of media when survivors share their stories and the impact trauma-informed approaches can have on survivor experiences.

Implications for journalism practice

When considering TIJ guidelines, for instance using open communication, collaboration, gaining informed consent and understanding how trauma impacts an individual (Quigley, 2023), findings of the current study demonstrate how they benefit survivors. Cherry (n.d.) recommends that survivors should not be expected to pay for accessing the pictures taken for the interviews. The present study offers a deeper explanation for why pictures (childhood and those taken for the purposes of the interview) are important for sexual abuse survivors.

Thus, it is recommended that the guidelines acknowledge the emotional significance of personal content, including pictures, to offer meaningful explanations for journalists. For instance, one explanation can surround links between the content and the evolution of a survivor's identity. This should provide further appreciation for journalists of the time and emotional effort survivors invest in giving interviews, hopefully encouraging them to offer clear explanations to survivors on copyright laws.

Similarly, although TIJ guidelines mention the need to follow up a story, the issue of journalists ceasing communication with survivor's after interviews is particularly damaging for the mental health of individuals. The stress of retelling a sexual abuse story can impact survivors in the form of flashbacks, difficult memories or by reinforcing their feelings of guilt and shame (Van der Kolk et al., 2014). Clear follow-up, updates about the publication of a story and closure (even if their story will not be published) were key indicators of respect that participants of this study wanted. This displays survivors' need to be seen as people deserving consideration throughout the process of sharing their narrative. Furthermore, to ensure survivors are followed up and supported beyond their interactions with journalists is important. Survivors can be signposted to the following support services: Samaritans, Shout, The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC), Rape Crisis England and Wales and The Survivors Trust. As noted by the participants of this study, support services were vital in offering validation, helping survivors consider their own needs and connect them with other survivor advocates. Alongside this, survivors can be provided with an information sheet that offers them further understanding about what they should expect in interviews (Cherry, n.d.).

Improving journalistic practice starts with teaching trauma literacy to journalism students and educators to develop the core competency of approaching interviews with empathy and respect (Healey, 2022; Ogunyemi and Price, 2023a). Ogunyemi and Price (2023b) found that one barrier to embedding a TIA to the journalism curriculum is a lack of specialist

knowledge and guidelines around managing trauma symptoms. Hence, a way forward could be mental health professionals (such as Clinical Psychologists) and survivor advocates providing consultations to institutions training journalists to support the coverage of TIJ and the ways in which different types of trauma manifest. For example, offering an understanding around how dissociation can become a barrier to understanding whether or not survivors want to answer questions. Due to their expertise in the nuances of psychological processes and collaborative communication, Clinical Psychologists are well-positioned to offer a holistic perspective. Alongside this, support can be offered to specific media organisations through workshops for journalists already working in the field.

Clinical Psychologists can also offer individualised support for survivors being interviewed. Specifically, it will be beneficial for there to be support from mental health professionals before and after interviews. Survivors can be guided to reflect on their expectations, preferences and needs throughout the process. Clinical Psychologists are well-equipped to support survivors when being interviewed, as they regularly offer trauma-informed support for their clients during talking therapy. They do this through offering time and space for their clients to explore what they are experiencing in a safe environment and reclaim ownership over their stories. By ensuring that survivors' needs are understood and there is mutual understanding (amongst survivors and journalists) around the interviewing process, the support from Clinical Psychologists could be invaluable. Although media support organisations currently offer support to survivors throughout the interviewing process, not all participants in this study had support from them. Therefore, providing survivors with advocacy support from media support organisations, alongside therapeutic support, may offer comprehensive care throughout their interactions with journalists.

Implementing the proposed changes for improving the quality of interactions between survivors and journalists may be challenging in terms of resource availability. The participants

in the study considered the systemic constraints on journalists, for example, pressures from legal teams around the final write up of their story. This offers a wider lens by shifting responsibility from the individual journalist onto the whole system. There are demands and restrictions that can influence a journalist's ability to offer trauma-informed spaces for survivors. The training and dissemination of knowledge that has been explored will not be enough if the system (such as media organisations) in which journalists practice do not offer flexibility. From the participants in study, there are some examples of the ways that journalists have created a safe space that is empowering and collaborative, showing that TIJ is possible. Professionals at all levels within media organisations are required to adopt TIJ to ensure the journalists interacting with survivors can adopt individualised approaches to interviews with minimal barriers.

Finally, it is important to highlight that even though the findings of this study can benefit journalism practice, it can also offer a better understanding of how survivors may want to engage with journalists. As many participants reflected on their initial lack of understanding about how to maintain boundaries when engaging with journalists, this study offers a nuanced account of the benefits and challenges involved in speaking to journalists. This can support survivors in making informed decisions about their engagement with the media whilst highlighting the importance of media support organisations supporting those survivors that are navigating these dynamics.

Recommendations for future research

Future research involving focus groups with journalists exploring their views on the themes of this study, and discussing practical ways that TIJ guidelines can be followed by the media is planned. The findings from such research could offer insight into why some trauma survivors do not hear back from journalists if the stories they shared in interviews are dropped. For instance, is it that journalists feel uncomfortable about being honest with survivors

regarding stories being dropped? Or do journalists believe that the lack of follow up experienced by some survivors is linked to limited education around working with survivors? Furthermore, the proposed research can offer an understanding on why contracts detailing terms on copyrighting the pictures of survivors are not fully explained to them.

Alongside conducting focus groups with journalists, future studies may use this methodology to interview either groups of or individual sexual abuse survivors to gather their perspectives on the findings of this study. These discussions could explore which aspects of the interview process survivors want control over, why that control matters to them and how they believe this can be implemented. This would offer additional insight into ways that TIJ guidelines can include more detail to aid the understanding of journalists. Another possible area of investigation is the effectiveness of training journalists around TIJ. This would allow researchers to collect pre- and post-training measures of confidence in approaching trauma survivors (specifically sexual abuse survivors).

Whilst not being the primary focus of the current study, the passage of time was found to be linked with the evolution of survivors' needs and interview experiences in many ways. This adds to the understanding around the chronosystem from the ESM (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). For instance, survivors who were further along their healing journey and had more experience in being interviewed, shared that they had a better understanding of their boundaries when speaking out. It will be interesting for upcoming research to delve into this temporality factor further. More specifically, qualitative research can compare themes that generate from the self-reported experiences of recently interviewed sexual abuse survivors to those of individuals interviewed many years ago. The findings of such research could add further support to the ESM, specifically regarding the changes experienced by sexual abuse survivors over time. This understanding could also allow journalists to offer more personalised interview

experiences, encouraging survivors to feel in control over their narratives irrespective of where they are along their healing journey.

Reflections

During the early stages of this research, I was acutely aware of my apprehension about my role as a researcher (which I reflected on in the Methods chapter) as this was an underdeveloped part of my professional identity. This was exacerbated by the importance I placed onto researching this area due to the need to offer sexual abuse survivors a space in research to express their views around journalism. Once I started to engage with the survivors during our interviews, I was struck by how quickly my anxieties dissipated. Despite it being difficult hearing their struggles and the retraumatising journalistic encounters they had at times, we connected on a shared purpose. It was clear that the participants and I were invested in making a difference by amplifying survivor voices and ultimately making meaningful change for the survivor community. Although I was conscious of the power I held as a researcher collecting, interpreting and portraying survivor experiences through my own lens, the interviews felt collaborative in nature.

During the interviews with the participants and data analysis, I felt frustrated and at times angry at journalists after hearing the survivor stories about being ghosted, the issues they had with the copyright over their pictures and the sensationalised headlines of their stories. However, during the write up of the results and the discussion chapter, I noticed some parallels between the systemic issues that can impact the work of mental health practitioners and a journalist. These reflections occurred when I considered the level of grace offered to the journalists by the survivors, even when they were negatively impacted by some journalistic interactions. From personal experience, psychologists may want to offer flexibility and long-term therapy sessions with clients but when there are service constraints, this can be extremely difficult. For example, prior to COVID-19, conducting therapy online or over the phone was

not as common. However, during the pandemic, services worked remotely which increased the use of videoconferencing platforms and telephones. Although this does not excuse bad practice or a lack of communication, I believe that this may be similar to the experiences of some journalists who may be under systemic pressures that restrict their ability to interact with survivors in the ways they want.

Following on from this, my personal concern as a researcher was whether this research reinforced any shaming for those survivors that felt silenced when journalists assumed they needed to be anonymous. Participants were informed about the anonymity elements of the research prior to the interviews for ethical reasons. However, I noticed a feeling of discomfort in myself when two participants shared that assuming anonymity gives the message that survivors should be in the shadows. I felt conflicted between psychology ethical guidelines of maintaining anonymity and the participants' desire to own and speak out as advocates. As mentioned by some participants, journalists' decisions can be constrained by legal requirements around anonymity or copyright. My own conflict with ethical constraints may have mirrored the systemic limitations experienced by journalists. This gave me greater empathy for the challenges journalists may encounter and inspired me to hear their views on how feasible it may be to apply the themes of this study in the real-world journalistic practice.

Additionally, throughout my doctorate and whilst writing up this project, I experienced an increase in my migraine attacks. I believe this was mostly due to my desire to produce a piece of work that does justice to the experiences shared by the participants (amongst other factors). Upon reflection, I wondered if this is how it may feel for journalists interviewing survivors and bearing responsibility in portraying their traumatic stories accurately. However, I was supported in developing my understanding around trauma research through supervisors with high levels of knowledge in the research area and Jo Healey who had insights into trauma reporting in journalism. Jo Healey's involvement in developing this project was invaluable.

Her professional experience as a journalist and a trauma reporting trainer ensured that the focus of this research was grounded in the real-world experiences of journalists and survivors. Her insights informed key decisions, including the development of the semi-structured interview guides and she offered an insider perspective on current discourse within journalism practice and research.

Finally, this research project has deepened my understanding of trauma, in ways that extend beyond my doctoral training. My knowledge around trauma predominantly came from lectures, discussions with peers and in clinical supervision. Therefore, gaining direct experience in interviewing survivors of both recent and non-recent trauma provided me with invaluable insight into the complex and varied ways trauma can manifest over time. My clinical training fostered a sense of curiosity and sensitivity in my questioning. This facilitated the gathering of nuanced data that may not have been possible with a structured interview style.

Conclusion

In sum, the present study extended on previous literature on trauma survivors speaking out by focusing on the unique experiences of sexual abuse survivors being interviewed by journalists in the UK. The findings were multilayered as they: replicated the systematic review findings of studies exploring trauma survivors speaking out in public contexts, gave insight into the factors that foster or hinder the healing journeys of sexual abuse survivors specifically when being interviewed, and finally, drew attention to the fact that the implementation of TIJ guidelines to interviewing survivors is inconsistent within the context of sexual abuse too. The following quote highlights the value of being heard whilst acknowledging the emotional cost of speaking out as survivors progress through their healing journey:

"You start losing your voice and you need to give your vocal chords a bit of a rest. And I'm sort of at that stage now where I don't […] really need to tell my story anymore. I feel as if I've been heard." – Lesley

Whilst not being the primary research area, this study brings attention to the following question: is it journalist attributes, a systemic shortcoming or both of these factors that means not all journalists are prioritising a trauma informed framework in practices?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Quality of Appraisal – CASP (2018)

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Taylor (2002)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y	Y	Y
Campbell et al. (2010)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Hamber and Lundy (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	C	Y	Y	Y
Aroussi (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Campbell et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y	Y	Y	Y
Barker et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kirchner and Niederkrotenthaler (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Yang (2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	C	Y	Y	Y	Y

[1] Y = Yes, N = No and C = Can't Tell

Appendix 2: University Ethical approval letter

04/03/2024

Miss Tugce Koca

Health and Social Care

University of Essex

Dear Tugce,

Ethics Committee Decision

Application: ETH2324-1015

I am pleased to inform you that the research proposal entitled "A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom" has been reviewed on behalf of the Ethics Sub Committee 1, and, based on the information provided, it has been awarded a favourable opinion.

The application was awarded a favourable opinion subject to the following **conditions**:

Extensions and Amendments:

If you propose to introduce an amendment to the research after approval or extend the duration of the study, an amendment should be submitted in ERAMS for further approval in advance of the expiry date listed in the ethics application form. Please note that it is not possible to make any amendments, including extending the duration of the study, once the expiry date has passed.

Covid-19:

Please note that the current Government guidelines in relation to Covid-19 must be adhered to and are subject to change and it is your responsibility to keep yourself informed and bear in mind the possibility of change when planning your research. You will be kept informed if there are any changes in the University guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

REO Research Governance team

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet for those recruited from the media support organisation

Participant Information Sheet for Research Project: A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom

Dear participant,

My name is Tugce Koca (*pronunciation: torch-e ko-ja*) and I am currently carrying out a piece of research entitled, "A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom (UK)" under the supervision of Dr. Danny Taggart (primary research supervisor) and Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin (secondary research supervisor). I would like to invite you to take part in this research study but before you decide to take part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?
This study is completed as part of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Programme in the Department of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex. This study will take place between October 2023 to September 2025 but data collection is expected to end by May 2025.

This participant information sheet provides you with information about the study and your rights as a participant if you choose to participate. I aim to explore the experiences of sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors during their interactions with journalists in the UK. I am interested in why survivors spoke to journalists, what they remember from the interaction, whether they watched or read the content about them and what they would have wanted to change about that interaction.

This is an important piece of research aiming to hear the voices of survivors with regards to their encounters with journalists and inform journalists about how best to approach survivors in the future.

Why have I been invited to participate?
You were sent a poster by [support organisation] outlining this study and you contacted the primary researcher. You expressed an interest in taking part in this study as you identify as a sexual abuse or sexual violence survivor who has interacted with a journalist in the UK at least once.

Should I take part?
This study is designed for people that meet the following criteria:

- Are over 18 years of age
- Are a UK resident
- You identify as a survivor of sexual abuse or sexual violence (including but not limited to sexual assault, child sexual abuse or sexual harassment)
- Have had at least one interaction with journalists in the UK about your sexual abuse or sexual violence experience
    - This consists of having conversations with a journalist, in the form of an interview (whether that is in person, virtual, over the phone or written).
    - This can be in any setting such as at your home, at another private location or in a public space.

Do I have to take part?
Naturally, there is no obligation to take part in the study. It is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this participant information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. However, if you change your mind in the future, you can withdraw your data at any point. If publications or reports have already been disseminated, your data within them will be anonymised and cannot be withdrawn.

What does taking part in the research involve?
Taking part will involve carefully reading through this participant information sheet and the consent form emailed alongside it. You will be asked to sign the consent form and return it back to the primary researcher. After the consent form has been returned, the primary researcher will send you a follow-up email with a demographic questionnaire attached. This email will also offer a date and time for your interview and request you to confirm your availability.

You will be asked to participate in a one-to-one, semi-structured interview. The data will be collected via individual interviews with the primary researcher which will take place on an online videoconferencing platform (Microsoft Teams or Zoom). The interview will be audio and video recorded using the recording function on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The interviews will last around sixty minutes during which you would need to be in a confidential space where you can talk freely and that you are uninterrupted. If you are interrupted during the interview, we will temporarily stop and discuss what the best course of action would be. There will be opportunities to rebook the interview for a more suitable time. You will not be directly asked to share specific details of the sexual abuse or sexual violence you experienced. You can share whatever information you feel comfortable, and you can tell the researcher if you do not wish to answer any of the questions.

Once you have completed your interview, you will be eligible for a £20 Amazon voucher for your participation. This voucher will be distributed via email by staff at the University of Essex. With your consent, your email address and first name will be provided to the finance officer to send you the voucher and for their record of payment. If you choose to withdraw from the research study after the interview, this will not affect you receiving your £20 Amazon Voucher.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
I cannot guarantee any specific benefit to taking part in the current study. Participating in this study will provide you with an opportunity to share your story which can provide insights into experiences sexual abuse or sexual violence survivors have when interacting with journalists. Your participation could also have an impact on highlighting gaps in journalist education around working with sexual abuse or sexual violence survivors.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
I hope that no harm is caused to you by taking part in this study, however, the interview may involve discussion of some emotive topics that may be upsetting for you. If you do become upset during the interview, you can take a break and you can withdraw your involvement from the research at any time. Should you need additional support following the interview, please see below details of organisations and helplines.

Where can I go if I need support after?
If you need support before, during or after the interviews, you can contact [media support organisation]. You can also receive support by referring to the following information.

In an emergency: Call 999 or go to your local A&E department.
If you're in crisis and need to speak to someone:

- Call **NHS 111** (for when you need help but are not in immediate danger)
- Contact your **GP** and ask for an emergency appointment.
- Contact **Samaritans** (call 116 123 – available 24 hours a day)
    - Website: https://www.samaritans.org
- Use the **'Shout'** crisis text line (text SHOUT to 85258 - available 24 hours a day).

National helplines for sexual abuse and sexual violence:

- **The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)** – is a UK wide support line who adults who have suffered abuse in childhood, which offers support and signposting to other services.
    - Helpline: 0808 801 0331 (Monday – Thursday 10am-9pm, Friday 10am-6pm)

    - Email: support@napac.org.uk
    - Website: https://napac.org.uk
- **Rape Crisis England and Wales** – offers telephone support for people aged 16+ who have been affected by sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, or childhood sexual abuse.
    - Freephone: 0808 500 2222 (Available 24/7 every day of the year)
    - Online chat via the website: https://247sexualabusesupport.org.uk/#live-chat
    - Website: https://rapecrisis.org.uk
- **The Survivors Trust** - provides support, advice and signposting to survivors of sexual violence, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.
    - Helpline: 08088 010818
    - Email: info@thesurvivorstrust.org
    - Website: https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org which contains signposting and resources.
    - The website has a page which can help you to find support within your local area: https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support

If at any stage during the research process you would feel you would benefit from additional support or counselling, the primary researcher will support you in finding services within your local area.

What information will be collected?
Demographic information will be collected through a word document, and you will be required to return this back to the primary researcher via email. This will include questions about your age, gender, ethnicity and brief information about the type of interactions you have had with journalists, including the length and frequency of these interactions.

In the interview, you will be asked questions surrounding your interactions with journalists for example, how you were contacted by journalists, your general views on this experience and the process after your interaction. **You will not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.** As mentioned above, the information obtained from the interview session will be audio and video recorded via the video conferencing platform used.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?
Yes, all the information you provide throughout the course of the research study will be kept confidential. Personally identifiable information will only be accessed by the primary researcher (Tugce Koca) and the research supervisors (Dr. Danny Taggart and Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin). Any personal details will be anonymised when the interview recordings are typed up, this includes any names of people or places, identifiable details of your sexual abuse or sexual violence experience and identifiable details of your interactions with journalists. Jo Healey (a professional stakeholder in the research) will only have access to the anonymised data which includes data that has had all identifiable information removed.

All information about you will be anonymous, therefore, no one else will be able to identify you in any publication. All information will be stored securely on systems at the University of Essex and on a password-protected device. All data that is collected from you will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Your data will be kept for a period of five years after the study and once five years has passed, your information will be erased from computers.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of this study will be used as part of a doctoral thesis deposited at the University of Essex. The researcher intends to publish the results of the study within a journal article and present them at conferences. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

What is the legal basis for using my data and who is the data controller?

The GDPR states that consent must be freely-given, specific, informed and unambiguous. Once you have read and understood the sections in the consent form, you can give written consent to participate by signing the consent form. The Data Controller is the University of Essex and the contact at University of Essex is the University Information Assurance Manager (dpo@essex.ac.uk).

Who has reviewed the study?
The project has been approved by the University of Essex Doctorate of Clinical Psychology Course. The University of Essex Ethics Committee 2 has reviewed and given ethical approval for this study.

What happens if something goes wrong?
If you have any concerns about any aspects of the study or you have a complaint, then please contact the primary researcher of the project (Tugce Koca – email address is below). If you are still concerned, believe your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction or feel that you cannot approach the primary researcher, please contact the departmental Director of Research in the department responsible for this project, Professor Camille Cronin (email: camille.cronin@essex.ac.uk). If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University of Essex Research Integrity Manager, Mantalena Sotiriadou (email: ms21994@essex.ac.uk). Please include the **ERAMS reference** which can be found at the bottom of this page.

You are welcome to ask questions at any point.

Thank you,
Tugce Koca

Name of the primary researcher and primary research supervisor

Primary researcher:
Tugce Koca, Trainee Clinical Psychologist
tk22597@essex.ac.uk

Primary research supervisor:
Dr Danny Taggart, Lecturer School of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex
dtaggart@essex.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Participant information sheet for those recruited word of mouth

Participant Information Sheet for Research Project: A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom

Dear participant,

My name is Tugce Koca (*pronunciation: torch-e ko-ja*) and I am currently carrying out a piece of research entitled, "A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom (UK)" under the supervision of Dr. Danny Taggart (primary research supervisor) and Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin (secondary research supervisor). I would like to invite you to take part in this research study but before you decide to take part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?
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This is an important piece of research aiming to hear the voices of survivors with regards to their encounters with journalists and inform journalists about how best to approach survivors in the future.

Why have I been invited to participate?
You expressed an interest in taking part in this study as you identify as a sexual abuse or sexual violence survivor who has interacted with a journalist in the UK at least once.

Should I take part?
This study is designed for people that meet the following criteria:

- Are over 18 years of age
- Are a UK resident
- You identify as a survivor of sexual abuse or sexual violence (including but not limited to sexual assault, child sexual abuse or sexual harassment)
- Have had at least one interaction with journalists in the UK about your sexual abuse or sexual violence experience
    - This consists of having conversations with a journalist, in the form of an interview (whether that is in person, virtual, over the phone or written).
    - This can be in any setting such as at your home, at another private location or in a public space.

Do I have to take part?
Naturally, there is no obligation to take part in the study. It is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this participant information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. However, if you change your mind in the future, you can withdraw your data at any point. If publications or reports have already been disseminated, your data within them will be anonymised and cannot be withdrawn.

What does taking part in the research involve?

Taking part will involve carefully reading through this participant information sheet and the consent form emailed alongside it. You will be asked to sign the consent form and return it back to the primary researcher. After the consent form has been returned, the primary researcher will send you a follow-up email with a demographic questionnaire attached. This email will also offer a date and time for your interview and request you to confirm your availability.

You will be asked to participate in a one-to-one, semi-structured interview. The data will be collected via individual interviews with the primary researcher which will take place on an online videoconferencing platform (Microsoft Teams or Zoom). The interview will be audio and video recorded using the recording function on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The interviews will last around sixty minutes during which you would need to be in a confidential space where you can talk freely and that you are uninterrupted. If you are interrupted during the interview, we will temporarily stop and discuss what the best course of action would be. There will be opportunities to rebook the interview for a more suitable time. You will not be directly asked to share specific details of the sexual abuse or sexual violence you experienced. You can share whatever information you feel comfortable, and you can tell the researcher if you do not wish to answer any of the questions.

Once you have completed your interview, you will be eligible for a £20 Amazon voucher for your participation. This voucher will be distributed via email by staff at the University of Essex. With your consent, your email address and first name will be provided to the finance officer to send you the voucher and for their record of payment. If you choose to withdraw from the research study after the interview, this will not affect you receiving your £20 Amazon Voucher.

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If you're in crisis and need to speak to someone:

- Call **NHS 111** (for when you need help but are not in immediate danger)
- Contact your **GP** and ask for an emergency appointment.
- Contact **Samaritans** (call 116 123 – available 24 hours a day)
    - Website: https://www.samaritans.org
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    - Website: https://napac.org.uk
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    - Freephone: 0808 500 2222 (Available 24/7 every day of the year)
    - Online chat via the website: https://247sexualabusesupport.org.uk/#live-chat
    - Website: https://rapecrisis.org.uk
- **The Survivors Trust** - provides support, advice and signposting to survivors of sexual violence, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse.
    - Helpline: 08088 010818
    - Email: info@thesurvivorstrust.org
    - Website: https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org which contains signposting and resources.
    - The website has a page which can help you to find support within your local area: https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support

If at any stage during the research process you would feel you would benefit from additional support or counselling, the primary researcher will support you in finding services within your local area.

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In the interview, you will be asked questions surrounding your interactions with journalists for example, how you were contacted by journalists, your general views on this experience and the process after your interaction. **You will not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.** As mentioned above, the information obtained from the interview session will be audio and video recorded via the video conferencing platform used.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?
Yes, all the information you provide throughout the course of the research study will be kept confidential. Personally identifiable information will only be accessed by the primary researcher (Tugce Koca) and the research supervisors (Dr. Danny Taggart and Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin). Any personal details will be anonymised when the interview recordings are typed up, this includes any names of people or places, identifiable details of your sexual abuse or sexual violence experience and identifiable details of your interactions with journalists. Jo Healey (a professional stakeholder in the research) will only have access to the anonymised data which includes data that has had all identifiable information removed.

All information about you will be anonymous, therefore, no one else will be able to identify you in any publication. All information will be stored securely on systems at the University of Essex and on a password-protected device. All data that is collected from you will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Your data will be kept for a period of five years after the study and once five years has passed, your information will be erased from computers.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of this study will be used as part of a doctoral thesis deposited at the University of Essex. The researcher intends to publish the results of the study within a journal article and present them at conferences. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

What is the legal basis for using my data and who is the data controller?
The GDPR states that consent must be freely-given, specific, informed and unambiguous. Once you have read and understood the sections in the consent form, you can give written consent to participate

by signing the consent form. The Data Controller is the University of Essex and the contact at University of Essex is the University Information Assurance Manager (dpo@essex.ac.uk).

Who has reviewed the study?
The project has been approved by the University of Essex Doctorate of Clinical Psychology Course. The University of Essex Ethics Committee 2 has reviewed and given ethical approval for this study.

What happens if something goes wrong?
If you have any concerns about any aspects of the study or you have a complaint, then please contact the primary researcher of the project (Tugce Koca – email address is below). If you are still concerned, believe your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction or feel that you cannot approach the primary researcher, please contact the departmental Director of Research in the department responsible for this project, Professor Camille Cronin (email: camille.cronin@essex.ac.uk). If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University of Essex Research Integrity Manager, Mantalena Sotiriadou (email: ms21994@essex.ac.uk). Please include the **ERAMS reference** which can be found at the bottom of this page.

You are welcome to ask questions at any point.

Thank you,
Tugce Koca

Name of the primary researcher and primary research supervisor

Primary researcher:
Tugce Koca, Trainee Clinical Psychologist
tk22597@essex.ac.uk

Primary research supervisor:
Dr Danny Taggart, Lecturer School of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex
dtaggart@essex.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Consent form for those recruited from the media support organisation

Consent Form

Title of the Project: A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom

Research Team: Tugce Koca (Trainee Clinical Psychologist); Dr. Danny Taggart (Clinical Psychologist); Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin (Clinical Psychologist)

Please initial box

1. **I confirm that I** have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet dated 16/01/2024 (version 3) for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without consequences. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal will be destroyed. ☐
3. I confirm that I am over the age of 18, a UK resident and a survivor of sexual abuse or sexual violence that has had an interaction with a journalist in the UK. ☐
4. I understand that whilst the researcher aims to minimise the risk of becoming upset, due focus of the research and the sensitive nature of the topics that may be discussed, I could find some of the interview upsetting. I understand that if I do feel uncomfortable during the interview, I have the right to stop at any point without any consequences. ☐
5. I can confirm that I have been provided with support helplines available in the participant information sheet should I need them during and after my involvement in the study. ☐
6. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project, and that confidentiality will be maintained. ☐
7. I understand that my fully anonymised data will be used for a doctoral thesis, research conferences and could be published in a journal article. I understand that once my fully anonymised ☐

data has been published, withdrawing my contribution will not be possible.

8. I understand that the data collected about me will be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers. ☐

9. I am aware that the interview will be audio and video recorded via the videoconferencing platform used (Microsoft Team or Zoom) and that the data collected about me will be stored in a password-protected folder. ☐

10. I understand that my first name and email address will be shared with the Finance Officer at the University of Essex in order to receive and confirm receipt of a £20 Amazon Voucher. ☐

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

Participant Name	Date	Participant Signature
_____	_____	_____

Researcher Name	Date	Researcher Signature
_____	_____	_____

Appendix 6: Consent form for those recruited from word of mouth

Consent Form

Title of the Project: A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom

Research Team: Tugce Koca (Trainee Clinical Psychologist); Dr. Danny Taggart (Clinical Psychologist); Dr. Emma Facer-Irwin (Clinical Psychologist)

Please initial box

12. **I confirm that I** have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet dated 05/03/2024 (version 4) for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily. ☐

13. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without consequences. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal will be destroyed. ☐

14. I confirm that I am over the age of 18, a UK resident and a survivor of sexual abuse or sexual violence that has had an interaction with a journalist in the UK. ☐

15. I understand that whilst the researcher aims to minimise the risk of becoming upset, due focus of the research and the sensitive nature of the topics that may be discussed, I could find some of the interview upsetting. I understand that if I do feel uncomfortable during the interview, I have the right to stop at any point without any consequences. ☐

16. I can confirm that I have been provided with support helplines available in the participant information sheet should I need them during and after my involvement in the study. ☐

17. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project, and that confidentiality will be maintained. ☐

18. I understand that my fully anonymised data will be used for a doctoral thesis, research conferences and could be published in a journal article. I understand that once my fully anonymised data has been published, withdrawing my contribution will not be possible. ☐

19. I understand that the data collected about me will be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers. ☐

20. I am aware that the interview will be audio and video recorded via the videoconferencing platform used (Microsoft Team or Zoom) and that the data collected about me will be stored in a password-protected folder. ☐

21. I understand that my first name and email address will be shared with the Finance Officer at the University of Essex in order to receive and confirm receipt of a £20 Amazon Voucher. ☐

22. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Participant Name	Date	Participant Signature
_____	_____	_____

Researcher Name	Date	Researcher Signature
_____	_____	_____

Appendix 7: Demographics questionnaire

Participant demographic questionnaire

Project title: A qualitative study of the experience that sexual abuse and sexual violence survivors have with journalists in the United Kingdom

Ethics reference number: ETH2324-0079

Participant number:

Please do not include any personal information on this document

Age (Years): _____ Gender: _____ Ethnicity: _____

How many times have you interacted with journalists about your sexual abuse and/or sexual violence experience? _____

Please choose the ways you have interacted with journalists surrounding your sexual abuse and/or sexual violence experience (you can tick more than one box if you have had multiple interactions):

__ Face to face

__ Telephone

__ Written

__ Other (please specify): _____

If your interaction was published, where was it published?

__ TV

__ Newspaper or Magazine

__ Other (please specify): _____

__ Not applicable

Roughly how long did your interaction with journalists take (if multiple, feel free to write the length of as many as you remember)? _____

When did you last interact with a journalist around your sexual abuse and/or sexual violence experience? _____

Thank you. All information you have provided will be confidential. Please return this questionnaire to: tk22597@essex.ac.uk

Appendix 8: Survivor interview schedules

- Can you start off by telling me about your interactions with a journalist?

  Potential follow up questions:

  - What media platform was the interview agreed to be published on (e.g. TV news, newspaper, online news article, radio).
  - How did they get in touch with you and how did you feel about this?
  - What happened in terms of the process? The structure of the interaction?
  - How many times did you meet them?
  - Was the first time you met them, the time you were expected to share your story?

- What was your experiences of interacting with the journalist?

  Potential follow up questions:

  - What compelled you to share your story with journalists?
  - How was the time flow like for you (fast, slow, normal, did not notice)?
  - What compelled you to share your story with journalists?
  - What was it about the journalists or process that helped or did not help you feel comfortable? How did the journalist interact with you?

- Can you tell me more about the process after the interaction?

  Potential follow up questions:

  - Were you given opportunities for previewing the interaction before publication on the relevant media platforms?
    - (if they did preview): Can you tell me about how comfortable you felt about requesting changes to the way the interaction would be publicised? What would have made you more comfortable?
    - (if they did not preview): How do you think previewing the interaction before publication would have made your experience different?
  - Where/who did you go to when you needed any support after the interaction?
  - Did you watch or read the report you gave? Why/why not?

- What aspects of your interaction felt positive (or neutral if they struggle to think of positives)?
- What aspects of your interaction would you have preferred to be different? Why?

- What would you want journalists to know? Any suggestions or recommendations for how journalists can approach survivors?

Appendix 9: Ally interview transcript

Interviewer: So, before we get into a little bit more about your experiences, I guess thinking about how much… did you know about the work that journalists did or do before being interviewed. Whether that's kind of personal experience or just awareness?

Ally: Okay, so I've done quite, I've done a few…I've had a few experiences with journalists. The first time I didn't have any experience…I didn't know what I was doing. I literally went in blind. However, I was supported by a charity which was really helpful, but I still, I didn't really know what I was getting into and so their support was really useful. But then that's when I joined [charity name] and [charity name] and then I got a lot of help and that's given me a lot of confidence to understand what journalists are doing and how it all works.

Interviewer: So, it sounds like the first time that you were interviewed, it was kind of with no support. You just kind of had your interaction, but since then...

Ally: Well, I I had…Yeah, I had support from the charity I was working with, but I didn't understand, I didn't understand really what was going on and but yeah since then, I've, that's when I got in touch with [charity name] and then they gave me all the tools to help me.

Interviewer: Hmmm yeah. And so when you did have that first interaction and you didn't really know what you were expecting. I guess my question is what were you expecting from that first interaction?

Ally: I don't think I really thought about it and yeah, I hadn't. I haven't really, what was I expecting? Yeah, I haven't put much thought into it. I just wanted to be heard…I had my own voice silenced for so many years in such a horrible way by my family, and I just want to be heard. I was just desperate to be heard. I had this amazing opportunity and I thought I'm gonna take it.

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Ally: So I don't regret it. But it's, ermm yeah, I don't regret it at all. They did an amazing piece. Everybody saw, but yeah, it was it was a learning curve.

Interviewer: So, did you mean that it ended up being a good interaction and a piece that was written up?

Ally: My problem with the interaction was, they… I was going through a [legal] case. And they promised that once they've written the article, they'd send it to me to check. And I can

change it. So, I changed it, sent it back, but then they printed the original version anyway, so they didn't take on my changes and that got me in trouble [because it was not in line with my statement].

Interviewer: Right.

Ally: Luckily, it didn't cause a problem and at first I thought, oh, maybe it's a mistake I made, but then it was the charity supporting me who said no no, this is what was agreed. And they've gone back on that. So I think it was a misunderstanding because they they had their lawyers, you know, in the papers they've got their own lawyers who decide what's printed or not. And I think they were working with what their lawyers were able to say and I was working with what I was able to say. So I think there was a miscommunication over which legal, yeah, over which legal route, not routes. What am I trying to say? Yeah, what each lawyer needed. So I yes, I think it was a bit of… I think it was a bit cheeky from their side because they could have clarified this, probably putting it a little bit mildly. I think they were putting their needs above mine, but maybe it wasn't clear from the outset exactly what I needed.

Interviewer: Sounds like the different kind of systems that were involved weren't really communicating with you as much as they had maybe promised initially.

Ally: Maybe their journalist didn't understand. Yeah, I think maybe maybe the people dealing with me didn't understand that. Yeah. Or whether they just didn't care, I'm not sure. I suspect they really didn't understand but didn't care enough to try and understand. It's probably something in the middle.

Interviewer: Hmm, so it sounds like we've kind of jumped to the process after, which is great, but is there anything…in terms of that process? So you were able to review what was written up, and it sounds like you felt quite comfortable saying I don't want this to…I want this to be changed. But it wasn't really followed.

Ally: Yeah. So basically, well, you know what? The journalists do…They kind of change things to make it seem whatever. You know, it was small changes on their part, but they were incorrect and it didn't fit with the statement I'd given. It didn't fit with what, you know, my legal case I was going through so, you know, they'd flocked up to make a nice, readable, fluffy story. But they've changed enough from the truth that my barrister picked it up and said, well, this detail isn't the same as that. That's what happens. So they were, you know, they were doing what they do and just change things within reason. But it was different...

Interviewer: Yes, I guess cause it's an ongoing thing. You did have that feedback from your

barrister and it wasn't kind of what you wanted to put across. I guess how, how did it make you feel when you did actually see it was published and it wasn't following what you had asked?

Ally: Yeah. Well, I absolutely panicked, absolutely panicked because I had the [legal] case. It was on a no win, no fee, and…I could have [lost lots of money]. You know, it was a lot of money and that's what I put at risk. That's what was at risk because they hadn't done what was promised. Luckily, that didn't happen, and I did ask my barrister before I did it. I did say, you know, because I knew this case was ongoing and I did say is it OK for me to do this article? And they said yes but as long as you make sure that what you're saying matches your statement. So I did have permission from them to do it. And it's yeah, so that's what we have. That was what the outcome was, so absolutely panicked. Got in touch with my barrister straight away and they said no, it's absolutely fine. I mean, they've got eagle eyes to notice these differences, and they did. On the other hand, I think they understand that journalists do kind of change details to make a better story. So I think in the end it wouldn't, I don't think it would ever have made my case collapse, but it was a risk.

Interviewer: And it sounds like it was kind of, yeah, that risk was there and also that uncertainty in that moment. Even though you eventually found out that it wasn't going to jeopardise the case, it was still that 'what if' worry and that there's so much on the line.

Ally: Yeah. Yeah, I really…I I was really shocked as well that they had gone against their words. I was like, I've sent them back the changes and they accepted maybe one or two of them, but the rest they just put in as they wanted, so they had seen them because they they took into account one or two, but the rest they just absolutely disregarded.

Interviewer: Yeah. I guess in that moment, what would…what would have been your preference because like you said, if they felt like the changes you asked for weren't possible, what would you have preferred before they published it?

Ally: Well, that's it with journalists though, they've got a very tight turn around and this was going to print. I mean, they sent it to me around midnight and I had an hour to tink around with it, so it goes for the print during the night because it was in the shops that morning. So uh, I think possibly we both learnt something that if there's a case, any case going on, don't do it. And I think that was a lesson for them as well, because the [first legal] case was finished and that's what they normally run by, isn't it? Have you got a conviction? OK, otherwise they're not interested. And I did have a conviction, but [I had another ongoing legal case]. So I think that was a lesson for everyone really.

Interviewer: Mmhmm yeah. So, I guess you were aware that there are those limitations to the field I guess and that in the future not to get involved in that way.

Ally: Yeah, I think umm, I I suppose what I didn't understand is because I still felt that with my corrections to make it really correct, it was still a good story. But of course they're the experts in what they do and they know how to tell a story. And to fluff it up nicely was part of that, so I guess it was like miscommunication or I don't know. I don't know what to put it down to, but yeah my advice would be if you've got any case going on, don't do it because you don't really have control of the story unless there is 100% certainty that you still have control of the story.

Interviewer: Hmm. Yeah. So thinking about the different media platforms that you've interviewed in, so you've said that you've done… so this is newspaper that we were talking about. Is that right?

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: And I think you've ticked off TV as well and radio.

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: So can you tell me a bit more about those other interactions?

Ally: Yeah, the TV was fine, and that was for a really short piece. That was online. And yeah, that was absolutely fine. The radio piece was funny because I really mucked up. Like it was for about half an hour and I really mucked up one bit and that was a piece they used. Actually, when I heard it, it sounded really authentic because I kind of stumbled over my words a little bit and I backtracked and whatever, and and the bit they used like, Oh God why did they use that? But actually, it sounded really, really authentic and I was fine with it. And I've only done prerecorded. I haven't done anything live. I'm too scared. I don't think I would do anything live simply because I know I've got the option to have stuff cut out or don't use this or whatever, so I wouldn't do anything live. Another one I did do was magazine articles as well and she was absolutely lovely. Ermm, yeah, the TV interview, radio interviews, they were fine. I've got no complaints there and the magazine was really lovely. I did an article for a magazine and she was just absolutely sweet. Really, really sweet. And we kind of like spoke about… because she wanted to do an article, you know, in one of those, you know, the rubbish magazines you have in dentists. The real like, when they've got stories and they're all they're awful.

Interviewer: Hmm yeah.

Ally: But yeah, she was really sweet and we spoke beforehand about what angle we wanted to get across and what messages we could put in the article. And then I told her my story. And then she kind of pulled out bits to fit the narrative that we wanted to get across. So we really worked together to get a… you know, she really wanted to do something good. We really discussed, OK, what are the messages? Let's take two or three messages we can try and put in the piece and then she really worked with me… and then before the piece was printed, she read out the piece to me. She wasn't allowed to send me the piece. I don't understand what the legal reason was that, but she wasn't allowed to send me the written piece.

Interviewer: Mmhmm

Ally: Maybe because I'd then have a copy of it before it was… I don't know what the reason was, she did read it out to me beforehand to check it was OK and she read it out to me twice and I said that was lovely. It was a really lovely piece. I was pleased with that, so I've had all kinds of experiences.

Interviewer: Hmm. Yeah. And maybe we can kind of come back to that in terms of the processes, because that sounds like it was quite a nice piece. But I guess in terms of thinking about before in your interactions, how did they kind of get in touch with you? Whichever experience that you want to kind of pull up on.

Ally: Okay, so I'm in touch with a few charities. So basically, journalists will contact the charities and say we're looking for someone for this. So some charities like, have a lived experience group especially for this. So I belonged to a few of those, so I think all of my contacts have come through those. None have been direct.

Interviewer: And was that the first time that you met them, were you kind of expected to share your story or did you have, like, a preliminary back and forth? How was the process in that sense?

Ally: I think basically the charities do that for me. So they will, yeah, they'll do the back and forth with the journalist. So basically I think what the charities have is depending on how big the charity is, they have a bank, not a bank. But they have like a uh, they know which people to deal with. And then the journalists will come approach them and say we're looking for a male, someone who's abused, via technology or whatever. And then the charity thinks okay who have we got? And then they'll ask more about what the journalist wants. And then they'll contact various people, depending on what the journalist wants and whatever.

Interviewer: Hmm. But it sounds like it felt a little bit more kind of controlled in that sense of, everyone being aware of what this interaction was going to be about.

Ally: Yeah. So basically what I get sent is the, not the brief. Is it called the brief? You know, when they send you a little thing? Ermm, I can't…

Interviewer: I think so.

Ally: Yeah, I can't remember what it's called, but they send you a little thing and they're saying we're looking to interview someone 15 minutes on TV, and this is the topic.

Interviewer: Alright.

Ally: And sometimes I don't know enough about the topic or it's not applicable. I don't have the lived experience for the topic. Very rarely that happens, but yeah, I have to think, what do I know about this? So they're basically sending me the brief. And then yeah then I I decide do I want to do it or not.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. And I guess moving to kind of the more the interactions actually in the moment, so you have made reference to some of them where it felt completely fine. But yeah, I guess you've kind of touched on why you shared your story with journalists. You wanted to feel heard.

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else around why you want to share your story with journalists that comes up?

Ally: You know, I hate doing it. I really don't like doing it. I feel really nervous and it's one of those, I don't know why I do it. The first time I did it, I wanted to be heard. Yeah. So I I think it was mostly because I was silenced for so long by my family. Who put the family…how do I say, the family came before me and it wasn't just me. I wasn't the only child in my family abused…but I was the only one to speak out and I was treated so disgustingly because I was vocal and said look, [the perpetrator] shouldn't be doing this. You know, shouldn't be seeing children. So to have my voice heard and I was really lucky that I had the opportunity to speak so publicly and so loudly, but on the other hand, I received a lot of abuse from my family for it, which was just more abuse...wasn't anything different than what I'd received at four. But I think beforehand I feel really, really nervous and initially afterwards I never listened to it because it makes me cringe. Like I keep copies, but I don't

read through them and feel really proud and I don't like the pictures. Ohh and often the words the journalists used is not how I would do it. You know, often with the tabloids, they… the way they word things, it's like ohh, that's really, I don't know, I wouldn't… you know, the way they do stories. You just like. Oh, that's awful, but it's still…

Interviewer: I guess for you, is there one thing that's similar to what you're talking about that kind of pops up for you in terms of how they've written something?

Ally: Well, you know how they… how the tabloids, they write their…they've got a special style of writing, you know. And you read it, you just like, oh it's not my style of writing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ally: It's not. It's not the way I want to tell my story, however, you know, these aren't publications I would read. However, people do read them and just because I don't read them doesn't mean that people can't learn from them. And so I kind of swallowed my snobbery over publications and just thought, no, this might change someone's life just because I don't read these publications.

Interviewer: Right.

Ally: I should not be so snobbish because that is still getting my story across. That might help someone.

Interviewer: Yeah. So that, that was the kind of question that I had. But you've kind of already answered it. What almost trumps that feeling of that fear and that not wanting to do it beforehand? Why do you go ahead? But it sounds like it's more around just getting that story across and it might help someone.

Ally: Yeah, because I think initially when the story is published or comes out, I have that fear. I'm waiting for abuse, from my family. You know, I'm bracing myself for that, but after a few days you know, I send it to my friends and you get lovely comments, well done whatever. And then I feel some sense of, okay, that's good. And then you get people approaching you on social media and whatever. Saying oh this happened to me too. I don't get much of that, but I know of other people who get a lot more and then you realise, yes, it has impacted some people and helped some people. But yeah, it takes me awhile afterwards, before I can feel glad I did that because I really don't like it.

Interviewer: Mmhmm. And it sounds like there's quite a few different things that play into it. You know, with your family as well, it makes sense why it feel there's that dread afterwards

as well. I guess thinking a bit about…so again, whichever experience that you've had with the interaction with journalists. How would you describe any of those interactions whilst being interviewed? Could you tell me a bit more about what they were like for you?

Ally: Yeah. One thing I would add, I've been scared that my family would kill me after some publications. Honestly, I literally thought I'm gonna get a bullet in the back of the head because my family is so angry. And I'm not the only one who feels like that. But as to the sorry, are you talking about my feelings after the…or during?

Interviewer: So during that interaction, as you're being interviewed, is there anything that you would want to kind of explore a bit more about that interaction?

Ally: Terrified. I'm absolutely terrified and I find it really frightening. Erm I always regret what I say after it's done. Quite paranoid. I feel like I wish I'd said something different and quite a few times afterwards, I always think, why didn't you say that? Erm, so generally I'm not happy with the pieces of my...I still feel I could have done better, so I'm quite… I kind of forget that actually you're put on the spot and most of the time they don't give questions beforehand. They might give you an idea of what the questions are gonna be. So we want to talk about this, but generally don't give you the exact questions.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ally: I understand why, because they don't want…how do I say… they don't want rehearsed response, so they'll tell you the topic, you've got some time to think about the topic. Ermm, which is really useful. I wouldn't do it without that, but then the questions come and, you know, it's like a job interview where you think you've practiced everything and then they come out with something else.

Interviewer: Was there, were there any kind of questions that you didn't like or the way that a journalist was in that moment that you didn't like at all?

Ally: No, I personally I don't have triggers, so I'm happy to be asked about anything. And from the training I've had from [media support organisations], I think what they did to me is they gave me back the power of like, for example, when I first was approached by the media, I felt I owed them something. They're doing me this great favour of giving me a voice, but they taught me, no, no, no. You're in the driving seat. Here, take back control, if you don't like something you say no. That was the best gift or the most important thing they gave to me. We practiced saying I don't want to answer that, so if they start asking you details of, you know, what actually happened you have training to say well I'm not going to go into that but

what I would like to say instead is… So I've had training on how to deflect these things if I don't want to answer them so.

Interviewer: Mmhmm. I guess on that note, maybe thinking about that first newspaper interview that you talked about earlier, it sounds like at that point you hadn't really had that training. How was that interaction like in that moment as you were being interviewed because you said you felt like they were giving you that space and you felt quite grateful?

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything that comes up for you about that?

Ally: As I said, I felt they were…so that was the first time. And yeah, I did feel in control. As I said, I felt like very much they've given me this space. I've got to do what they said, but actually I was supported by a charity to do it and they were there to, to stick up for me, which they did. And they were there... the whole time and I am prepared to speak about what happened to me. I don't get triggered when I'm speaking about what happened to me. I'm just saying words. It's not going, you know, actions aren't going through my head. I'm just speaking words. I've spoken a million times before and I'm happy to share that, and I mean if if a publication went into real detail, I'd be like why, you know, I'd stop them because it's not necessary. And I think, yeah, with my first interaction, the only thing I did lose control of was what was printed about me. Otherwise, that was fine, but obviously that was quite a big thing.

Interviewer: So, it was more, in terms of losing the control, do you mean not during that interaction, more the printed afterwards?

Ally: Yeah. Yeah, because I had a photographer. Who was really lovely and the journalist was lovely as well. You know, everything was fine until it came to what was printed. Which wasn't, you know, went against what we'd agreed. But other than that, no, it was fine.

Interviewer: And so in terms of, like you said, you don't feel like you get triggered maybe compared to other survivors. In that moment, some survivors might experience noticing the time moving differently, so when they're kind of in the interview process, it can feel like it's moving very quickly or not remembering what they said. Did you notice anything around kind of the time or your memory in those moments of being interviewed at all?

Ally: I think I have a normal reaction. I mean, considering I'm really frightened, you know, I'm really, really nervous. And it seems to take ages but I wouldn't say this is anything to do with my abuse. I think it's to do more with the situation that I'm in and I'm in an interview and there's a lot of responsibility about what I say. And you know, if this is going out on

[news organisations] or something, there's a lot of responsibility in that. But yeah, just really, really nervous. And just like in a job interview, I would say no different from that exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ally: In fact, it's the same experience of how I would feel.

Interviewer: Yeah. Would there have been anything that would have helped in those situations to help with those emotions, or does it feel like it's just part of the process?

Ally: I think it's just, I think it's just normal nerves and I mean, I've had exercises to do beforehand breathing exercises and they say if you stand up…and because often they're online now, if you stand up, you kind of feel a bit more confident. You can put your shoulders down and all that rubbish, but it's… I say rubbish but they are helpful tips, but still I feel really nervous.

Interviewer: Hmm. Yeah. So yeah, it sounds like it's kind of part of that process for you. Like you said, just kind of being in that moment and having to share. And it being kind of your responsibility in that moment to get it across in a way that makes sense as well.

Ally: I think more responsibility is just that I'm in position to look a right idiot, you know.

Interviewer: Right. The embarrassment, yeah.

Ally: Exactly. And I… and that's why I wouldn't do something live, because I think it's too risky. You know you can say something really stupid and you know… because you just like mumble...I mean and in job interviews I've said ridicul... you know, things are still cringe. Oh God, you know this is like 20 years ago and I still cringe when I think of job interviews. So, to me the actual interviews feels very much like a job interview.

Interviewer: Hmm, okay. And you mentioned obviously with the [news organisation], you said that there was a bit where you were stumbling over your words or something similar and initially you didn't obviously want that to be included but you ended up being okay with it. Was that pre-recorded as well then? It sounds like you...

Ally: Yeah. So that was pre-recorded and I think you do have…literally because the journalists are under such, you know, they're really busy, they've got really short time scales and whatever and they can take this piece and they go and work it and take it. You know, they listen to it and see what bits they pull out, and generally they don't have time to come back to you and say you okay with it? And I kind of understand that. So I understand that it

might not be, you know, if I've said something, I think I really, really don't want that, that came out wrongly. Can you take that bit out? I would say it, but otherwise I'd just leave it and just think well, you know, hopefully they don't use that piece, but if they do that's, you know, that's not great. But then in this one case they did use that piece and I was like oh trust them to use that piece. But actually it sounded really good. It just sounded really natural. Someone stumbling over their words and you know and yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. And so, and we've already kind of spoken about the process after with the newspaper. So, you were able to review it and look at it, even though it didn't go as expected with the TV and radio compared to the magazine, it sounds like… were you able to review it beforehand?

Ally: The magazine? Yeah, she read out to me on the phone.

Interviewer: Oh yes yeah, yeah.

Ally: She wasn't allowed to send it to me, but she did read it out to me to check that I was okay with it. And then with the radio and TV, no. They...ermm, they didn't. But I kind of expected that, they don't have the time. And yeah, ermm, yeah, they don't have the time.

Interviewer: Hmm. And with the magazine one, it sounds like that was quite a positive experience for you. I mean in terms of the different aspects of that interaction, you said that you had a bit of a talk around what it would be about beforehand as well, is that right?

Ally: Well, I guess she was really lovely. So, it was like a three...How do I say like three sides. Yeah, it was like a table spread and then one thingymabob. So, it's like one of their real life story things. And so we just spoke a little bit beforehand and we just discussed, okay what do we want to tell the viewers? Okay, we want to tell the viewers it can happen to everyone and it can happen, you know, it can be someone you know… really most of the time it's someone you know. So, we just for example, just picked out three points like that which we wanted to teach the general public. And then I told her my story. And then she fitted my story around these two or three points. Which I thought was really good. She did it really, really well. And as I said, I don't always like the way they write these stories. They're a little bit cringy in my opinion, but that's, you know, I'm not the main reader and other people would have read it.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds quite… it sounds very collaborative. To kind of start off by thinking about what are our aims with writing this piece as well.

Ally: Yeah, she was really sweet and I really like that. She yeah, I mean, her aim wasn't just

to write an article and get paid. She was keen on, what can we do to change something? So that was really nice, yeah.

Interviewer: Hmm. What were the aspects of kind of control that you felt in that moment with this one?

Ally: Well, that I definitely had. I mean, but this was after I've had training by [media support organisation].

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Ally: You know, and [the media support organisation] said, you know, they were absolutely amazing. They've taught me so much about, well, everything and having control of the narrative and just picking what you want to get across. So, this is where I could put all these things into play and yeah, so that was lovely that I did feel I had control of the narrative. Ermm, but working with [the journalist from the magazine] was, yeah, it took a long time. I mean, maybe six months or something for the piece to come out, but she was very good at updating me and saying… you know, there were always...in media it's always how do I say like oh, it's next week, it's next week. And then you know, it was very, very unpredictable, but she kind of kept me up to date saying, we're thinking of publishing this in January. And then she would let me know. So, she was really good like that.

Interviewer: So yeah.

Ally: …and…

Interviewer: Sorry, go on.

Ally: I was gonna say if you wanted to know about bad media things. I think my biggest problem with journalists is they get in touch with you and then you never hear from them again. So I don't know if you wanted to have hear about those experiences.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's always important to kind of see… obviously it's good that there are those positive ones that you've had, but if there is anything that you think could have been a bit better that would be useful to know as well.

Ally: I would say… three quarters of the times I've been approached by journalists nothing goes ahead. You know at least three quarters of the time, basically the charity will get in touch with me and say this reports going out tomorrow. And you know, would you be willing to speak? And I say that's fine, whatever. And then during the day, I might get one or two

thingymabobs. Will you be…can you be ready at 1:00 o'clock for this? That's absolutely fine. And then at 11:30, it's like cancelled and so three quarters of the times it gets cancelled at the last minute. And I absolutely don't mind. I'm always quite relieved, to be honest. I actually don't mind cause I know how that goes, but what I do mind is when people don't get in touch with you, which has happened and so like for one time I spoke to journalists for about half an hour and she wanted to do [an interview piece] and yes for about half an hour. And then never heard from her again. And what it did is it left me hanging because she told me what she wanted from…what the aim of the [interview piece] was so, you know, I spent two weeks thinking, okay, how can my experience fit into this? What parts of it do I fit the narrative? And then after two weeks like I sent an email. You know what's happening? Didn't hear anything back. And then you realise you've been dumped and it just leaves you hanging, and that happens. That used to happen quite a lot.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Ally: Ermm, I think I understand that journalists are really busy, but it's really bad. You know, all I want is a thanks for your time, but we're not gonna be taking that forward just so you can, like, close your… okay, move on now, but yeah.

Interviewer: I guess what is it about? So, you did say you were left hanging. But what…what is it about, that kind of no response that it leaves you with?

Ally: Because I think in my mind, I'm still thinking that this piece is gonna go ahead. So, I'm thinking of what I'm gonna say and how I'm gonna pull this together. And I'm always treading on eggshells whenever I do think, I'm treading on eggshells. Because although my family has been awful, I don't want to name and shame people. So, I want to tell people exactly what's happened, but I don't want to name individuals. So I'm literally treading on eggshells like being quite cagey trying to get my point across. And so in my head, you know, I'm doing the gardening thinking, oh, you know, I'll say this and this. Oh, this is where I can get through that and then over time, you don't hear anything and you're like oh. Like dressing up for a date and then at the last minute they don't turn up and you're like, oh, okay, I've done all that work and you know, this has been the whole… I've been thinking about this for the entire time. It happens a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like even though, like you said earlier, you are at a point where you don't feel that kind of trauma response when you're talking about your experience. It's…there's a lot of emotions still around sharing and being in that interaction of like, like you said, that fear. Well, that kind of sense of embarrassment. Maybe if something does happen so, it sounds like there's that build-up of just occupying your mind, but when you

don't get a response, it's kind of just falls flat a little bit and feels like maybe it wasn't going…there wasn't a point to that and no closure from that interaction maybe as well.

Ally: Yeah. It's just rude. It's just really rude and it happens a lot. I know other people complain about this. How they get contacted by someone and you know they're all geared up because you're all kind of, you know, it's a big thing. You're all geared up and then you don't hear anything, you haven't got that closure. You've just got a slow kind of like realisation, oh, this isn't gonna happen. So, I mean with the [news organisation] one for an article that afternoon or something, you know…there's very…I mean they always get back to you. Actually, they're very good at saying, you know, sorry, but this piece has been scrapped now or we haven't got time because [another story has come up] or something like that. That happened once. I am, yeah, so it's more bigger pieces or the longer term pieces that happens with.

Interviewer: Hmm yeah. And like you said earlier, it sounds like…what would you want to be a different? Would just this simple kind of acknowledgement of that in an email or something just to say it's not going ahead?

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: Just wanting some closure and clarity on that.

Ally: But it's rude, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ally: Right. Let's go out for dinner sometime and then I, I got ghosted, ghosted by journalists.

Interviewer: Hmm yeah, yeah. And it sounds like with that [interview piece] that you were talking about you… it seemed like you had a half an hour call or an interaction with them. Ermm, so it is a substantial amount of time to kind of put aside to talk about that and it was just kind of left.

Ally: Yeah.

Interviewer: Without any other contact… contact with you or letting you know. How was that half an hour interview or not interview… that kind of chat with them?

Ally: That was fine and I was basically telling them my story and what had happened to me.

And then I just didn't hear and I did follow up with an email like a week later saying, you know...you know what's happened? Hadn't heard anything. That was ignored as well.

Interviewer: Not ideal at all. Okay. Was there anything else in terms of anything that you would have wanted to change generally? Ermm, one of the more not negative, but the interactions that you don't really have a positive memory of.

Ally: Oh let me think. Yeah, actually my first interaction. You know, when I said that I felt really grateful they took pictures. I haven't gotten any… I'm of that age where we didn't have that many pictures of us when we're kids, you know, like, I think younger people now have just got millions. We didn't have many and I don't have many, I probably got about 10 or something of my childhood.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Ally: It's not many and yeah, the first interaction I did, I signed over copyright of all those pictures to the media because they were gonna use some for the article and they didn't know which ones they were gonna use. And I foolishly did that. I wish I thought…you know, that's something I did, but with hindsight I thought oh, a nice contract was that they only had copyright of the ones they used or something. I wish they could have explained to me you know, once you've signed these over, you can't use them. I'm sure actually they wouldn't…like maybe if I wrote to them and just said, you know, can I use the photographs that you didn't use? Maybe, but that's something I did and I regret because I didn't know.

Interviewer: I think you were…so you kind of signed over and you're not really sure now if you can use those pictures and there is such little pictures available to you that it's I guess, what did it mean to you to sign it over?

Ally: Well, I lost...yeah, copyright, I can't use them cause I've got a blog now. I can't use them or anything. To be honest, I think rationally it's likely that they've just taken them and they've stored somewhere. I'm sure they know I wouldn't use the pictures they've used that they've published with the paper, and that's fair enough. Ermm, but the other ones I'd like to use, so I've handed over copyright of all my pictures to a newspaper. I don't think…I'm sure they wouldn't even mind if I use them. You know they're not using them, but the fact I just felt afterwards, ah, I wish someone had said to me… or I wish the contract had been different. And they could say, you know, we've only got copyright of the ones we've used.

Interviewer: Yeah. And it's kind of part of your childhood and that kind of identity. Yeah, quite kind of important things to hold on to.

Ally: Yeah. Well, I mean, I've still got the pictures myself, I just can't use them for publications and what they could have done was put a clause on it and just said for a year you can't use these.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Ally: I think actually in the contract there might have been a, you can't tell your story for another year or something.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Ally: The contract. I don't know if you've seen them. They're very basic.

Interviewer: No, I haven't seen them.

Ally: Yeah, they're very basic. They're all different, so there's no continuity, but they're generally quite basic.

Interviewer: So, it seems like you would have maybe hoped for there to be more kind of consideration around that in the contracts and making it a bit more personal to that in terms of the pictures.

Ally: Yeah, but it's very much in their favour, we have copyright of all the pictures, but actually they could have… they're not gonna use all the pictures, so they could have been a bit, we only have copyright of the pictures we use. They've just made it really easy for them.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. And was there anything else that came to mind in terms of any of your interactions? Anything you wanted to kind of share about them?

Ally: I think, yeah, I would say don't ever read the comments for online stuff because I stupidly… they told me not to do it and I did it and although most of the comments are really lovely, there's some horrible ones and you don't never forget those.

Interviewer: Hmm, right.

Ally: Ermm, I think for these kind of, maybe they should not put the comments…give a place for comments. But then that's up to me to read them or not, they told me not to. Like telling a small child not to eat the cake.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's kind of what I was thinking. It is quite hard if it is online for you to read the article and not read the rest of it. It is hard, even if you've been told not to, so it's, it's tricky.

Ally: Yes

Interviewer: I guess to kind of wrap it up a little bit and you've kind of given some suggestions for maybe how to improve their practice throughout our talk today. But kind of as a final point, what would you want…maybe journalists to know…maybe in terms of recommendations on how they might approach or be in interviews, so anything that you would want to kind of add to what you've already said.

Ally: Money we haven't spoken about money. And that's one thing that comes up quite a lot. People asked…and this is what comes up in my survivor groups, people being asked to do stuff for free and like they will pay everybody else, but they won't pay for their lived experience despite what they have to go through. Ermm, hang on a minute…I've got… if you can give me a second. I did… I should have done this before, sorry. I was part of a group, we wrote a thing for journalists. It's a…what was it? It's like to help journalists deal with survivors in the media, so it's kind of like, don't do this. Don't do that. Let me see if I can find it quickly and then I might…it might give me some ideas. Ohh, journalists guide. I've got quite a few of them, so which was it? It's not that one. I'm sorry, I've got quite a few.

Interviewer: That's OK.

Ally: Oh can I can't find it now. Basically, yeah. What we did… and this was with [charity name], they…oh, maybe I can find it on their website. So basically, they've produced a report to give to journalists for when they're dealing with victims and survivors. Let's see if I can find it on the website… I wouldn't want to take up that time now, but yeah, that was one thing that came up a lot was money. And what else was there? Ermm, I think a lot of victims… survivors said they didn't get the support they needed and I'm not that bothered about that. One thing that I haven't said though is after I have done something with the media, I feel like, you know, like you can't do anything. You can't sit down and write a report or anything. You just have to watch a film or something because it's just in your head. It's just all that, all that adrenaline and whatever.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

Ally: And then thinking about the things you should say so the rest of the day is a complete write off.

Interviewer: And in terms of compensating for that? It sounds like that is important because the whole day is kind of a write off because you can't do anything else, so it makes sense. Also, why does the money element come up regularly for survivors?

Ally: Yeah I think for some things I got paid for… the new magazine article I got paid for that and often I'll do stuff and the money they give, I give to the charity. In fact I think everything I've done, I think for the magazine I gave that money to charity because I've…I felt uncomfortable taking it, but I don't think I will now. I think I'll keep all the money myself. I felt like I didn't want to make money out of abuse, if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ally: But now I see it more that that's my time and whatever I think, it's changing a little bit for survivors. I think they're now like saying, hey, no, I want to get paid now. So that's changing, but things like [news organisation] article, I don't think you could get paid for that. I don't even know actually.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm not sure as well, but no, that's a good point alongside kind of the other points that you mentioned throughout. Yeah. I guess that's kind of all the questions I have. Unless there's anything else that kind of pops into your mind that you want to kind of share now. If not, I can end the recording and then we could kind of finish things off.

Ally: No, I don't think there's anything else. What I'll do is afterwards I'll find this document and I'll see if there's anything else that I've missed. And because we all have done a lot of work with journalists, it has been a problem. People have had horrendous experiences and so that's why this stuff has come up. I think the biggest thing we said, as a kind of like if there's one thing you can tell journalists, it's just respect and we said to people, you might say something wrong. You know, you might say something that's triggering, or you might say something that's victim blaming or upsetting, but we all say wrong things so don't be frightened to ask, but just to give respect to that person. I think that was the biggest thing to come out of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ally: But yeah, anyway. But no, I think I've said…there might be big points that I've missed, like money cause that did come up a lot, people saying that they were expected to do loads of things and just not be compensated at all for their time. So, if I think of anything else, I'll just send it as an email because it would just, it would be a short bit.

Interviewer: Yeah, that would be really useful and I think that's a really nice point to kind of end it on where just being aware that you don't need to know everything in terms of journalists, it's more around being aware that you might mess up say something that triggers someone, but also then kind of being able to offer that understanding and that support and that space for that person as well. So, I think that was a nice point to kind of round off of what we've been talking about anyway. Okay, so I will end the recording now.

Appendix 10: Coding example

Quotation	Code	Sub-Theme	Theme
"you feel like you're being exploited. And I think that's the downside to this is that people like myself do this for the greater good. Do this to raise awareness and […] I've never been paid a penny for any of this, but all these commercial organisations are making a living out of it. And they're not acknowledging it."	For the greater good Raising awareness Voluntary participation	Helping others by creating conversation	Interviews create purpose and empowerment
	Used for profit Unacknowledged Feeling exploited	The one-sided business transaction of survivor stories	Challenges faced in the interview process