

Working paper on the need to establish the Prevalence of Non-recent Child Abuse in Northern Ireland

June 2026

Prevalence / Northern Ireland

Recommendation and Summary

The Commissioner recommends that a survey examining the prevalence of non-recent child abuse, including child sexual abuse, be considered in Northern Ireland.

There are significant gaps in Northern Ireland in relation to research on child abuse. The lack of research was recognised by the 2019 Gillen Review Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences – a key recommendation of which is to conduct research into the ‘prevalence, extent, nature and experience of serious sexual offences’ in Northern Ireland.¹ Prevalence data would enable government, statutory agencies and service providers to more effectively plan, resource and implement responses and services for victims and survivors of historical/non-recent child abuse.

Since COSICA was established in December 2020, over 1,300 people have engaged with the office. One in five of those contacting us are outside of the office’s statutory remit. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) in ‘exceptional circumstances which make it appropriate to do so’ is also empowered to assist adult survivors of adverse childhood experiences ‘if it relates to any action taken in relation to him [*sic*] at a time when he [*sic*] was a child or young person’.² This legislative linkage between the two statutory bodies also requires the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse ‘on becoming aware in the course of exercising the Commissioner’s functions of a matter which comes within the area of responsibility of NICCY’ to ‘consult that Commissioner’.³ NICCY recently noted their ‘deep regret’ that recommendations for a Barnahus model have not been advanced, and that this has become a ‘matter of urgency for child victims’.⁴

The Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland commented in a recent report that ‘when trauma is left unaddressed, its effects can persist across generations and reinforce cycles of disadvantage’.⁵ Data collection on the impact of the Troubles on Northern Ireland’s adult population is rich and impactful.⁶ Conflict-related PTSD prevalence has been estimated at between 5.1% and 8.8% of the adult population.⁷ It is striking, however, that comparative standalone data on the prevalence of child

¹ Sir John Gillen, *Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland* (2019) [gillen-report-may-2019.pdf](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/gillen-report-may-2019.pdf) ([justice-ni.gov.uk](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk))

² The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. <https://ik.imagekit.io/niccy/wp-content/uploads/media/1843/niccy-legislation-2003.pdf>

³ Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act 2019. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/31/data.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.niccy.org/news/statement-on-the-public-prosecution-services-sexual-offences-bulletin/>

⁵ Office of the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland, *Mental Health in Northern Ireland Current Services and Strategic Priorities* (2026). [Mental Health in Northern Ireland 2026 Final Version 1.pdf](#)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Troubled consequences: a report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland* (2011). <https://www.cvsni.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2011-Research-Troubled-Consequences-A-Report-on-the-Mental-Health-Impact-of-the-Civil-Conflict-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf>

abuse in Northern Ireland is absent. If Northern Ireland conforms to international prevalence estimates, it is likely the proportion of the adult population affected by child abuse likely equals or surpasses that of the Troubles – yet much of the specialist mental health infrastructure, such as the Regional Trauma Network, is geared towards addressing the needs of victims and survivors of Troubles-related PTSD.

Child abuse in all its forms has far-reaching implications for public health, justice, education, and the economy. The Home Office's 2019 report on the economic and social cost of contact child sexual abuse estimates the direct financial and non-financial cost of child sexual abuse in England and Wales up to April 2019 was at least £10.1 billion.⁸ 64% of these costs are borne by victims and survivors, the rest by governments. The costs include prevention, education, treatment, justice, physical and emotional harms to victims and survivors, and lost economic output. One recent (2025) estimate put the lifelong economic cost of sexual violence and abuse against children in England and Wales at £148 billion.⁹

The final report delivered by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales estimates that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 16.¹⁰ Extrapolated across the population of England and Wales this amounts to an estimated 3.1 million adults. A Central Statistics Office survey released in 2022 found that 25% of adult women in the Republic of Ireland experienced non-contact sexual violence as a child.¹¹ Over a third (36%) of women did not disclose their childhood experiences owing to feelings of embarrassment and shame.¹² Other international studies bear this out. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found a 28.5% rate of child sexual abuse.¹³ In the USA it was 10.4%.¹⁴ Global estimates ranged from 8 to 31% for girls and 3 to 17% for boys.¹⁵ A recent (2025) study published in *The Lancet* puts the aggregated global figure at 18.9%.¹⁶

There is critical consensus that adequate prevalence data collection is both an essential and largely absent tool in current global efforts to support victims and

⁸ The Home Office, *The economic and social cost of contact child sexual abuse* (2021).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-economic-and-social-cost-of-contact-child-sexual-abuse/the-economic-and-social-cost-of-contact-child-sexual-abuse>

⁹ [Lifetime cost of sexual violence revealed | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

¹⁰ *The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (2022).

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20221215051709/https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/31216/view/report-independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-abuse-october-2022_0.pdf

¹¹ Central Statistics Office, *Sexual Violence Survey* (2022).

<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/sexualviolencesurvey/sexualviolencesurvey2022childhoodexperiences/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Pérez-Fuentes G., et al., *Prevalence and correlates of child sexual abuse: a national study* in Comprehensive Psychiatry, volume 54, issue 1 (2013), pp 16-27. [Prevalence and Correlates of Child Sexual Abuse: A National Study - PMC](#)

¹⁴ Barth, J., et. al., *The current prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide: a systematic review and meta-analysis* in International Journal of Public Health, volume 58, issue 3 (2013) pp 469-83. [The current prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide: a systematic review and meta-analysis - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cagney, J. et. al., *Prevalence of sexual violence against children and age at first exposure: a global analysis by location, age, and sex (1990–2023)* in The Lancet, volume 405 (2025). <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2825%2900311-3>

survivors of child abuse and prevent future sexual violence. We already know that crime statistics for sexual violence do not reflect the full prevalence of child sexual abuse. NSPCC studies consistently reveal significant under-reporting.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that victims and survivors are more inclined to disclose abuse during formal research processes because of their right to remain anonymous, without concern about an investigation by authorities or the effect on their family life. Prevalence data will also reveal important information about the profile of those who harm children, with some evidence suggesting that around 40% of institutional child sexual abuse could result from harmful sexual behaviour exhibited by other children aged under 18 years.¹⁸ This data could significantly improve our understanding of child sexual abuse, inform interaction with victims and survivors and contribute to safeguarding policies.

The demonstrable need for a prevalence study examining child abuse including child sexual abuse is borne out in the findings of 'The Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland' report published in 2025.¹⁹ 8.1% of survey respondents reported experiencing child sexual abuse. The prevalence figure for women and men revealed a notable differential: 6.4% of men reported experiencing childhood sexual abuse, compared with 9.4% of women.²⁰ This wide-ranging survey is unlikely to have captured the true scale of child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland owing to a known – and entrenched – tendency towards non-disclosure. There are advantages for wider society in conducting prevalence research. It could help stimulate a national conversation and assist victims and survivors in overcoming often deeply ingrained barriers which prevent them from disclosing. This would help create an environment where survivors know they are not alone in their experiences – and that they have choices. Operating in parallel should be practices and pathways that allow survivors to safely disclose if they choose to, and the ability to access appropriate services in support of their choices.

Victims and survivors are often hidden in plain sight within health and social care services, and non-recent child abuse remains vastly under-reported and under-recognised. A recent Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry report asserted that 'in most countries children find it difficult to report experiences of abuse to social workers or the police' and that, in most instances, data extrapolated from self-reporting likely minimised the true scale of child abuse.²¹ Child sexual abuse is under-reported and relies on victims self-disclosing. Child abuse, and in particular child sexual abuse, often elicits feelings of secrecy, guilt and shame which act as a significant barrier to disclosure. One in Four, the Republic of Ireland's specialist support service for adult

¹⁷ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/statistics-child-abuse>

¹⁸ There are varying data on sexual abuse by peers. See [The impacts of institutional child sexual abuse: A rapid review of the evidence - ScienceDirect](#). See also the final report of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, which finds 63% of survivors indicated they were the target of another child's harmful sexual behaviour in historical residential and foster care or contemporary out-of-home care. [Final Report - Volume 2, Nature and cause \(childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁹ Colm Walsh et. al., [The Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland](#) (2025).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

²¹ Lorraine Radford, Steven Dodd, Christine Barter, Nicky Stanley & Ather Akhlaq, *The abuse of children in care in Scotland: research review* (2017). [prevalence-of-abuse-in-scotland-executive-summary-professor-lorraine-radford.pdf](#)

survivors of child sexual abuse, reported a record-breaking rise in people seeking support in 2024 – especially men.²² This increase in self-disclosure is likely to continue. A study examining non-recent child abuse including child sexual abuse, particularly data disaggregated according to age and gender, could provide useful insights into the reality of children and young people now.

A prevalence study in Northern Ireland would help us better understand need and plan specialist, community and general health services more effectively. The implications for individual victims and survivors, communities, statutory and non-statutory service providers and policymakers of *not* collating prevalence data present stark and ongoing risks.

The proposed study could draw on the recent Republic of Ireland model or that adopted in the UK by the Office for National Statistics (outlined in **Appendix 2**). These studies offer a useful model which capture comprehensive data relating to non-recent child sexual abuse, the profile of perpetrators and the settings in which abuse occurred.

²² [Press Release – One in Four, Annual Report & Strategic Plan Launch, Monday 20th October 2025 – One In Four](#)

The case for a prevalence study examining non-recent child abuse including sexual abuse in Northern Ireland

*The knowledge of child sexual abuse—the recognition of its prevalence and the reality of its impact—has been lost and found in repeated cycles within society . . .*²³

The Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (COSICA) was established by the Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act 2019. The Commissioner's principal aim is to promote the interests of any person who suffered abuse while a child and while resident in an institution at some time between 1922 and 1995. The Act requires the Commissioner to *'provide advice on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors to the Executive Office or a person providing services to victims and survivors... on whatever other occasions the Commissioner thinks appropriate'* and empowers the Commissioner to *'make representations or recommendations to any person about matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors'*.²⁴

It was a key recommendation of the 2019 Gillen Review Report to conduct research into the 'prevalence, extent, nature and experience of serious sexual offences'.²⁵ Without adequate data, the ambition of supporting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse operates in a vacuum. Even the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) stated that *'data on the number of children who resided in residential homes over the period in question (1922 to 1995) is not complete and the Department is therefore currently unable to provide a reliable estimate of the numbers of eligible victims and survivors'*.²⁶

While a prevalence study would not provide a definitive answer as to the precise number of victims and survivors of historical/non-recent child abuse, it would at least provide an approximation of incidence levels across the Northern Ireland population. The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry revealed that physical abuse often occurred in tandem with sexual abuse.²⁷ The impact of child abuse including child sexual abuse on victims and survivors is wide-ranging, long-lasting and potentially life-altering. The absence of prevalence research highlights the challenges around understanding the wider incidence of child abuse/child sexual abuse which is compounded by relatively low disclosure rates among victims and survivors; many of

²³ Joanne Stubley and Danny Taggart, 'Contemporary Developments in the Area of Non-recent Child Sexual Abuse: Moving from What Is Wrong with You and What Happened to You, to What Are We Going To Do About It Now?' in *British Journal of Psychotherapy* (2023) 1–6.

²⁴ Functions of the Commissioner: Historical Institutional Abuse (Northern Ireland) Act 2019. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/31/part/2/crossheading/functions/enacted>

²⁵ Sir John Gillen, Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland (2019). [gillen-report-may-2019.pdf](https://www.gillen-report-may-2019.pdf) ([justice-ni.gov.uk](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk))

²⁶ Report by the C&AG on The Executive Office – Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20.pdf ([niauditoffice.gov.uk](https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk))

²⁷ Sir Anthony Hart, *Report of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry* (2017). <https://hoja.dk/HIA%20Inquiry%20Report%20pdf%20version.pdf>

whom are battling trauma and shame which are in themselves barriers to disclosure and potentially accessing services, supports and justice.

The Commissioner's reference to 'historical/non-recent' child abuse including child sexual abuse covers abuse which occurred before an adult victim and survivor was 18 years old, and may have occurred several decades ago.²⁸ This follows the recent (2022) Central Statistics Office Sexual Violence Survey in the Republic of Ireland, which focused on abuse that occurred before the victim and survivor was 17 (the legal age of consent in the Republic of Ireland). The survey revealed a childhood contact sexual violence prevalence figure of 20%. This publication may be helpful to consider in the context of progressing a prevalence survey in Northern Ireland.²⁹

The Commissioner wishes to draw particular attention to this model because it has revealed vital information about the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the Republic of Ireland. This includes information regarding abuse settings and useful insights as to profile of both perpetrators and victims. It shows, for example, that 7% of adults who experienced contact sexual violence as a child experienced it from a person in authority. This figure is skewed towards older age groups; peer abuse is more likely in younger age cohorts – 73% of contact child sexual abuse cases among those aged 18-24 reported that the perpetrator was also a child.³⁰ The survey also finds that disclosure rates (not necessarily to police) are around 47%, indicating that sexual abuse is significantly more prevalent than this figure indicates.

Significant research has also been undertaken in the United Kingdom in recent years. Of note is the 'Abuse during childhood in England and Wales' report published in November 2025 by the Office for National Statistics, based on data captured in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). The report estimates that 9.1% of people aged 18 years and over experienced sexual abuse as a child (13.9% of women compared with 4.1% of men).³¹ The Home Office, subject to agreement on funding, will engage the Office of National Statistics to conduct a pilot survey in Spring 2026.³² This survey will:

- Produce an estimate of abuse experienced during childhood by those aged 18-25 (by late 2026)
- Produce a prevalence estimate of child abuse, including child sexual abuse (to be published in mid/late 2027)

The Commissioner witnesses firsthand the long-term effects of child abuse including sexual abuse on adult victims and survivors of historical/non-recent child abuse. The pervasive, lifelong effects of child sexual abuse are well documented. The Adverse Childhood Experiences study found that childhood adversity (including sexual abuse) affects adults throughout their lives as a primary cause of mental illness, addictions and chronic disease.³³ COSICA's research on the social impacts of institutional child

²⁸ https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/types-of-abuse/non-recent-abuse/?utm_old=nonrecent

²⁹ See Appendix 2 for further discussion of this survey.

³⁰ <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/sexualviolencesurvey/sexualviolencesurvey2022childhoodexperiences/>

³¹ [National Analysis of Police Recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation CSAE-crimes-report-2024-for-England-and-Wales-Totality-3-V2.pdf](#)

³² [Tackling child sexual abuse: progress update \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

³³ Developed in 1998 by Felitti. Now known as PACES (Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences)

abuse reveals that victims and survivors often report difficulties in maintaining interpersonal relationships and self-regulatory behaviours.³⁴ Social and relational difficulties, parenting difficulties, substance abuse, criminal behaviour and re-victimisation, as well as feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame are among the negative impacts.

The lack of data on child sexual abuse can also be considered in the context of human rights: the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CRC/C/GBR/5) recommends that governments: *“strengthen the systematic collection of data and recording of information on violence against children, including domestic violence, gender-based violence, abuse and neglect, in all settings, and the sharing of information and referral of cases among relevant sectors”*.³⁵

Establishing baseline data will not only render the extent of child abuse including child sexual abuse more visible, but also victims and survivors themselves – whose particular needs have, for too long, been poorly understood. Stubbley and Taggart note that the Truth Panel (one arm of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) heard testimony from over 6,000 adult survivors of child sexual abuse. This *‘created a new space for speaking about [child sexual abuse], that is more stable and culturally validated’* and potentially fills *‘a lacuna that has surrounded responses to non-recent [child sexual abuse], a gap created because of ... failures in recognising ... the scale of the problem’*.³⁶ However, the report concludes that the lack of reliable data measuring the prevalence of child sexual abuse impedes the ability of statutory agencies, and society, to prevent and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse.

A prevalence study of child abuse including child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland aligns with key Programme for Government strategic imperatives. The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy highlights a ‘need for local research and disaggregated data to inform policy and service development’.³⁷ Recent reports including ‘Every Voice Matters’ and ‘It’s Just What Happens’ show that sexual violence significantly affects women and girls across Northern Ireland. ‘Every Voice Matters’ shows that 50% of girls reported experiencing a form of violence or abuse before the age of 11, and that 8% of girls reported experiencing child sexual abuse.³⁸ Aggregating data about non-recent child abuse including child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland will supply important baseline detail and inform contemporary policymaking and direction.

There is an opportunity to build on this important work and understand the prevalence of non-recent child abuse including child sexual abuse. The extent of child abuse including child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland is still not known, and

³⁴ *Consultation on Supports and Services to Victims and Survivors of Non-Recent/Historical Institutional Child Abuse: Executive Summary* (2026). <https://www.cosica-ni.org/files/cosicani/2026-02/Consultation%20on%20Supports%20and%20Services%20to%20Victims%20and%20Survivors.pdf>

³⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) Concluding observation to the UK state party, para 43(b). Available at: [Treaty bodies Search \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/Treaty_bodies/Search)

³⁶ Joanne Stubbley and Danny Taggart, ‘Contemporary Developments in the Area of Non-recent Child Sexual Abuse: Moving from What Is Wrong with You and What Happened to You, to What Are We Going To Do About It Now?’ in *British Journal of Psychotherapy* (2023) 1–6.

³⁷ *Draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2030* (2023). [dsa strategy consultation paper.PDF \(justice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/dsa-strategy-consultation-paper)

³⁸ [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/Ending-Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls)

the policy landscape remains fragmented. While the Commissioner recognises that research into all forms of child abuse is needed, COSICA recommends that a survey into the prevalence of non-recent child abuse including child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland should be considered as a priority issue.

A prevalence study cannot hope to reflect the full lived experience of child abuse including child sexual abuse. Nor will a prevalence study reveal the reality of victims and survivors who left Northern Ireland and who now live elsewhere. A prevalence study can, however, provide baseline statistics to better understand the extent of non-recent child abuse including child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland – and in the process identify gaps in service provision, and drive legislative and policy interventions to the benefit of victims and survivors.

Child abuse should be viewed through the lens of public health epidemic requiring integrated strategies encompassing prevention, protection and prosecution. Child abuse is prevalent in every country where it is measured and requires a coordinated global response to prevent and treat effectively.³⁹ Childlight has called for an ‘epidemiological surveillance system’ for child sexual abuse and that ‘proven public health model and industry disruption tactics’ — could be employed in this space.⁴⁰ A Northern Ireland prevalence study could be used to underpin public health efforts not only in Northern Ireland, across the United Kingdom and on an all-island basis to tackle child abuse.

³⁹ <https://www.childlight.org/about/public-health-approach/public-health-and-child-sexual-exploitation-abuse>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Appendix 1: Policy Context

A prevalence study will support the work of the Commissioner in promoting the interests of victims and survivors of historical institutional child abuse and help create a legacy approach of positive action to acknowledge the scale and impact of such abuse. It could form the first step in a process to ‘deliver meaningful, effective and empowering restorative benefits to victims/survivors and ensure accountability’.⁴¹

The findings of a prevalence study could have important implications for departments and agencies responsible for education, health, communities, and justice where the impact and legacy of childhood abuse on supports and services can be most acutely felt, and where reliable prevalence data would permit responses to be better planned, trauma-informed and resourced.

The study will also support an outcomes-based approach to the Programme for Government, which promotes the need for a whole societal approach, drawing together scientific and technical expertise and the use of relevant data to focus resources and track the impact of policy interventions.

It will provide an opportunity for cross-departmental engagement and support the delivery of strategic and policy priorities for government, tying in with current initiatives such as the Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls and the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

International examples indicate that prevalence research has the potential to cause distress to participants. However, the recent Australian Child Maltreatment Survey found that participant distress is infrequent and transitory, and that it is possible to fulfil ethical requirements to participants and demonstrate trauma-informed practice. It is important to note that participants who experienced distress maintained that their involvement was, ultimately, worthwhile.⁴²

⁴¹ David O'Mahony and Michelle Butler, *Empowering Victims/Survivors or Restorative Washing? Institutional and Clerical Sexual Abuse of School Children and Restorative Justice* in The British Journal of Criminology, Volume 66, Issue 3, (2026).

<https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/66/3/554/8180928>

⁴² [Improving measurement of child abuse and neglect: A systematic review and analysis of national prevalence studies | PLOS ONE](#)

Appendix 2:

Comparative table of prevalence studies

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
Scotland	The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) is a statutory inquiry looking at the abuse of children in care in Scotland. SCAI was established in October 2015 and is chaired by Lady Anne Smith KC. The inquiry investigates residential care establishments for children where there were child abuse claims – including boarding schools, foster care settings, borstals, and religious institutions. The Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act was passed in 2021 following the Scottish Child abuse enquiry. The initiative provided financial redress to individuals who experienced abuse in residential care settings before 2004.	The inquiry’s website offers an ‘Evidence Hub’ for documents including witness statements, transcripts of hearings, case study findings, and reports by care providers. One interim report noted that: “The biggest gap in the research evidence on prevalence is the lack of research specifically focusing on Scotland. No research sources were found that directly addressed the prevalence of abuse in care in Scotland over the entire period of this review (1930-2014). The evidence from research prior to the 1990s is particularly sparse. Grey literature sources and inquiry reports provide some information, but it is inconclusive. No robust	N/A	High 16 volumes of case study findings have been published to date. SCAI opened submissions in relation to Phase 10 of its investigations in December 2025. Phase 10 will consider the provision of residential care for children and young people in establishments run by Local Authorities and establishments run by voluntary providers used by Local Authorities. It is not known when the inquiry’s final report and recommendations will be published.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
	The work of SCAI is ongoing and its work is demarcated from that of the recently announced Public Inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse, chaired by Professor Alexis Jay .	estimates of the historic prevalence of abuse in care can be made as a result".		
Republic of Ireland	The recent Republic of Ireland's Sexual Violence Survey (2022) provides one possible model. This survey was led by the Department of Justice, with cross-departmental actions and initiatives, following a recommendation in the Republic's national Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Strategy. The survey was carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The survey, asked of adults in Ireland, captures lifetime prevalence grouped into two main categories: non-consensual sexual experiences when the respondent was 17 and older, and when the respondent was 16 and younger (the legal age of consent in the Republic is 17).	The survey looked at child and adult sexual violence occurring in the past. The report found that 20% of adults experienced contact sexual violence as a child. Women experienced roughly the same levels of sexual violence as children and as adults. The report noted that women were almost four times likelier than men to have experienced sexual violence, both as an adult and as a child. This disparity is consistent with the findings of other reports listed here. The survey also collected information that could provide a picture of perpetrators. While they were not identified by name, descriptors such as	20% experienced contact sexual violence as a child	High This survey yielded important information about sexual violence that occurred in the past, both to adults and children. The survey questions around perpetrators and settings of abuse are especially relevant to non-recent abuse.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		teacher, family friend, etc, indicated that 78% of respondents knew the perpetrator.		
England & Wales	Office for National Statistics (ONS) In November 2025 the ONS published estimates on prevalence and type of abuse experienced during childhood, based on findings of people aged 18 years and over from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).	The majority of victims of child sexual abuse knew the perpetrator; one-third (33.2%) said the perpetrator was a stranger. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse were most often male (91.3%) and most often aged 18 years and over (69.8%), with women experiencing abuse by older perpetrators more frequently than men. Prevalence of each type of sexual abuse was higher for women than men. 9.8% of women experienced contact	9.1% of people aged 18 years and over experienced sexual abuse as a child (13.9% of women compared with 4.1% of men).	High This is a detailed and highly valuable survey which reveals important data about historical/non recent child abuse. It offers a snapshot of key information around victims/survivors age and gender profile, perpetrator details, the context in which abuse occurred, and whether or not abuse was disclosed.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		sexual abuse compared with 2.9% of men. Among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, 40.1% said that the perpetrator was under the age of 18 years, while 69.8% said that the perpetrator was aged 18 years and over. Sexual abuse most commonly began when victims were aged between 13 and 15 years (33.4% of victims), followed by those aged between 10 and 12 years (22.9%). Among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, 43.1% of victims disclosed the abuse at the time it occurred. They most commonly disclosed to someone they knew personally		

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		(39.5%), followed by someone in an official position (10.6%) and other support professionals or organisations (3.9%). Differences by sex of victim were evident, with 47.0% of women saying they told someone at the time compared with 29.3% of men. The Hydrant Programme reported that if someone does not disclose within an initial 12 month period; it can be up to 17 years before they feel ready to disclose.		
England & Wales	<u>The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)</u> in England and Wales examined the duty of care taken by public bodies and other notable institutions in protecting children from sexual abuse. It was announced by the Home Secretary in July 2014 and published its 19th and final report in October 2022.	The final report included 20 recommendations for government as "a matter of urgency". These included: - the introduction of a statutory requirement of mandatory reporting. - the establishment of a national redress scheme for England and Wales	The IICSA estimated that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 16 in England and Wales.	High The IICSA final report commented: "The lack of reliable data which measure the current prevalence of child sexual abuse in England and Wales impedes the ability of statutory

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
	IICSA held 325 days of public hearings. It processed over two million pages of evidence and heard from 725 witnesses. The Inquiry has also published 61 reports and publications. Over 7,300 victims and survivors engaged with the work of the Inquiry. More than 700 gave evidence at public hearings or provided statements. Over 6,200 came forward to share their experiences at the Truth Project and nearly 1,800 joined the Inquiry's Victims and Survivors Forum.	• the creation of a Child Protection Authority in England and in Wales; • the creation of a cabinet-level Minister for Children; • a public awareness campaign on child sexual abuse; • amendment of the Children Act 1989 to give parity of legal protection to children in care; • more robust age-verification requirements for the use of online platforms and services; • a guarantee of specialist therapeutic support for child victims of sexual abuse.		agencies and society more generally to prevent and respond appropriately to such abuse. The ONS assessed the feasibility of a survey measuring the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the UK and, in April 2022, it concluded that there was “no fundamental reason not to conduct a survey”.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
Australia	In 2012, Australia announced a Royal Commission into institutional responses to child abuse. The final report included the following recommendation: <i>The Australian Government should conduct and publish a nationally representative prevalence study on a regular basis to establish the extent of child maltreatment in institutional and non-institutional contexts in Australia.</i>	The primary findings of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study were published in April 2023. Surveying ages 16 to 65, the study found that 32% experienced physical abuse, 28.5% experienced sexual abuse, 30.9% experienced emotional abuse, 8.9% experienced neglect, 39.6% experienced exposure to domestic violence. A key finding is that child maltreatment is not something that happened only in the past; it is happening to 1 in 4 children in Australia now. The study also found that most people experienced more than one type of maltreatment, and that the median duration of this was years. This is a complex problem which is more difficult to treat than single maltreatment	28.5%	Medium/High This study of child maltreatment covered five types of maltreatment, surveying over 8,000 participants. It yielded important information about the prevalence of child maltreatment both now and in the past. If adopted for a Northern Ireland context it would go beyond sexual violence to reveal other types of child abuse. There is much to learn from its methodology.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		and is associated with poorer outcomes. The study found that child maltreatment is a gendered problem, affecting girls disproportionately. Girls were found to experience significantly higher rates of emotional and sexual abuse, with 1 in 3 compared to 1 in 7 males. The study also sought to determine the associated impact on key health outcomes throughout life. It found that 40.2% of those who experienced child maltreatment qualified for a mental health diagnosis. Other implications included an increased likelihood to smoke, have obesity, to have engaged in self-harm and to have attempted suicide.		

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		Surveying different age groups made it possible to identify trends, i.e., a lower proportion of young people reported experiencing physical abuse, compared to the older generation. Sexual abuse by parents and caregivers in the home was also found to be declining. However other types of abuse such as emotional abuse are becoming more prevalent.		
United States of America	The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) is an ongoing survey that collects the most current and comprehensive national- and state-level data on intimate partner violence, sexual violence and stalking victimisation in the USA. The latest report was released in December 2025 which used data collected between	Almost half of women (45.1%) and more than 1 in 6 men in the USA experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetimes. For both women and men, unwanted sexual contact that did not involve sexual penetration was a commonly reported form of contact sexual violence experienced in their lifetimes. In addition to unwanted sexual contact,	N/A	Low This survey presents key findings on the prevalence of sexual violence in the USA. Its focus on different types of sexual violence, and its regularity of repetition, generates a complex picture of the prevalence of sexual violence.

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
	September 2023 and September 2024.	approximately a fifth of U.S. women reported experiencing rape and sexual coercion in their lifetimes; completed forced penetration was a widely reported form of rape.		However, it does not have a specific focus on child abuse and its applicability is limited.
United States of America	Prevalence and Correlates of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) examined the prevalence, correlates, and psychiatric disorders of adults with history of child sexual abuse (CSA). More than 34,000 adults aged 18 years and older residing in households were face-to-face interviewed in a survey conducted during the 2004–2005 period.	The prevalence of CSA was 10.14% (24.8% men and 75.2% women). Child physical abuse, maltreatment, and neglect were more prevalent among individuals with CSA than among those without it. The frequency, type, and number of CSA were significantly correlated with psychopathology.	10.14%	Medium/High This study focused on CSA and linked it with other types of abuse, such as emotional abuse and neglect. It asked questions with a rank from 1 to 5, where people who answered 5 had no history of abuse, and those who answered other numbers did. The study finds a high prevalence of CSA (10%) but not as high as the Rol finding of 20%. While differing methodologies make it difficult to compare the findings of studies in different

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
				jurisdictions, it does point to the value of country-specific studies.
Canada (Province of Quebec)	The Prevalence of Sexual Abuse among Children and Youth study (conducted in 2011/12) estimated the prevalence of child sexual abuse in a representative sample of Quebec adolescents and documented its associations with mental health problems and health-risk behaviours. The target population included all students in Grades 10 to 12 (aged 14-16) attending public and private schools in Quebec.	14.4% of girls and 3.5% of boys reported unwanted sexual activities involving touching, while 5.3% of girls and 1.4% of boys reported forced sexual relations involving penetration, for an overall prevalence of 14.9% for teenage girls and 3.9% for teenage boys. Both unwanted touching ($\chi^2 = 261.75$, $P < .001$) and abuse involving penetration ($\chi^2 = 83.03$, $P < .001$) were reported more frequently by girls compared to boys.	14.4% of girls, 3.5% of boys	Medium This study surveyed children to ascertain the prevalence of child sexual abuse. It did not focus on adults reflecting on non-recent abuse, and was not able to show differences among different age cohorts. An overall prevalence of 14% is reflective of the overall figure in other case studies.
Germany	Child Maltreatment in Germany This study was conducted in 2016, examining a representative sample of the German population for childhood maltreatment using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire.	Overall, 2.6% (f: 3.9%, m: 1.2%) of all participants reported severe emotional abuse, 3.3% (f: 3.4%, m: 3.3%) severe physical abuse, 2.3% (f: 3.7%, m: 0.7%) severe sexual abuse, 7.1% (f: 8.1%, m: 5.9%) severe emotional neglect and 9% (f:	2.3%	Low This was a smaller study, involving 2,500 participants, and focusing on child maltreatment. Similar to the Australian Childhood Maltreatment

Jurisdiction	Description of study	Findings	Overall prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) rate (%)	Relevance to a Northern Ireland prevalence study (low, medium, high)
		9.2%, m: 8.9%) severe physical neglect. Women were more likely to report at least moderate sexual and emotional abuse than men. The largest difference between age groups was reported for physical neglect, with participants aged over 70 years reporting the highest rates.		Study, this study revealed information about five types of child maltreatment. A finding of 2.3% for child sexual abuse is a low outlier compared to other jurisdictions.