

Ultra-orthodox Jewish communities and child sexual abuse: A case study of the Australian Royal Commission and its implications for faith-based communities

Article

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Abstract

To date, little is known about manifestations of child sexual abuse (CSA) within ultra-orthodox Jewish communities both in Australia and abroad. There is a paucity of empirical studies on the prevalence of CSA within Jewish communities, and little information on the responses of Jewish community organisations, or the experiences of Jewish CSA survivors and their families. This paper draws on a case study of two ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations from the recent Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to examine the religious and cultural factors that may inform Jewish communal responses to CSA. Attention is drawn to factors that render ultra-orthodox communities vulnerable to large-scale CSA, religious laws and beliefs that may influence the reporting of abuse to secular authorities, and the communal structures that may lead to victims rather than offenders being subjected to personal attacks and exclusion from the community. Commonalities are identified between ultra-orthodox Jews and other faith-based communities, and reforms suggested to improve child safety across religious groups.

Introduction

In February 2015, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse held a two-week public hearing to examine the responses of two ultra-orthodox Jewish institutions affiliated with the international Chabad Lubavitch movement to allegations of child sexual abuse (CSA): the Yeshivah Centre and Yeshivah College in Melbourne, and the Yeshiva Centre and Yeshiva College in Bondi, Sydney. In March 2017, the Royal Commission (RC) conducted a further review of the two institutions. This was the first ever official investigation of Jewish institutional responses to CSA in the global community, as opposed to some discrete criminal and legal investigations mostly in the USA.

Prior to that date, there had been only limited public discussion of CSA within Australian Jewish organisations. In July 2011, Manny Waks, a community leader who had been sexually abused by two adult males as a schoolboy at Yeshivah College in the late 1980s, publicly revealed his experiences in the Melbourne daily newspaper, *The Age* (Topsfield, 2011; Waks, 2016). Waks and a number of other victims of CSA within ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations later presented their stories to the Victorian Government Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations (Waks & Anonymous others, 2012; Waks & Waks, 2012). But it was the RC's forensic examination of CSA in 2017 within the two Chabad organisations which sharply exposed concerns about ultra-orthodox Jewish responses to CSA to public and media attention.

The cultural and religious context of Jewish CSA in Australia

It is estimated that just over 100,000 Jews live in Australia today (Graham & Markus, 2018). The majority reside in the two largest cities of Melbourne (State of Victoria) and Sydney (State of New South Wales (NSW)). The community includes a wide spectrum of spirituality ranging from the ultra-orthodox sometimes alternatively called 'frum' or 'haredim' (groups of Jews known as Hassidism or Mitnagdim bound by the desire to preserve traditional values and practices known as Halacha) to the traditional orthodox (who adhere to traditional religious beliefs but also participate in the modern world) to progressive Jews (who observe a modernised version of Judaism that integrates with the surrounding culture) to those who are completely secular. Many Jews define themselves by Jewish ethnicity or culture, rather than by religious identity. It has been estimated that only about 4% of the community fall into the ultra-orthodox category (Fagenblat, Landau & Wolski, 2006; Graham & Markus, 2018).

The biggest ultra-orthodox grouping in Australia, the Chabad movement, was originally founded in 1912 by a group of families who established a farming settlement in the Victorian rural town of Shepparton. That group was supplemented by a small post-World War II immigration of families from Russia and has since grown to a community of about 400 families, or approximately 1,000 people in both Melbourne and Sydney (Bernstein, 2000; Greenbaum, 2003; Royal Commission, 2016, 2017a; Rubinstein, 1991). Chabad is one branch of the large Hasidic movement that was originally established in the mid-18th century in Eastern Europe, but now has its headquarters in New York. Most Hasidic groups are closed communities that have relatively little contact with non-Jews or even with less religious Jews. But in contrast, Chabad espouse a love for all Jews and are known for their active outreach work to Jews, whether religious or not, in all corners of the world. This includes a major role in charitable activities such as assisting persons affected by substance abuse, providing emergency relief, caring for children with a disability, and providing a chaplaincy service to Jews who are in prison (Eliezrie, 2016; Fishcoff, 2003).

Chabad communities remain inward focused, and most social and economic interactions, including marriage, are confined to members of the group (Royal Commission, 2016; Waks, 2016). Chabad are also bound by the same socially conservative moral codes pertaining to modesty and restrictions on sexual behaviour outside marriage, gender segregation and hierarchical religious structures as other ultra-orthodox Jewish groups that exclude women from decision-making positions (Pelcovitz & Mandel, 2011). On the surface, they appear to provide warm and tolerant environments for their adherents including those who experience mental health problems or other personal difficulties. But as we shall see from the RC findings, this inclusive tolerance can be problematic when it comes to recognising and addressing CSA in their communities.

Prevalence of CSA in Jewish communities

To date, there is limited information on the prevalence of CSA within Jewish communities including variations between different Jewish religious denominations and across different countries, and whether or not rates of CSA may be higher or lower than in the general community (Katzenstein & Aronson Fontes, 2017; Melchior & Waks, 2015; Pelcovitz & Mandel, 2011). For example, an overview of CSA in ultra-orthodox communities in the USA and Israel noted that 'little empirical evidence exists', but concluded on the basis of informal interviews with 17 experts that prevalence rates in the communities were 'similar to the rates found in the general population' (Lopiansky, Berman, & Eisen, 2017, p. 14).

A search of 11 general platform databases using terms such as 'child sexual abuse in Jewish communities' and 'Jewish responses to child sexual abuse' identified only four empirical studies on CSA. This included three based in Israel and one in the USA. No Australian research was found.

One study of 1,005 'randomly selected' patients of family medical clinics in Israel aged 18–55 years reported that 25% of participants had experienced CSA (Schein et al., 2000, p. 667). The figure was much higher for women at 30.7% compared to 15.7% for men. Ninety-two per cent of the study were Jews who reported a rate of 30.8% for women and 17.2% for males. The other 8% were Moslem or Christian Arabs. The study found that a higher number of self-reported religious men reported abuse (26%) than

those who were traditional (17%) or secular (12%). However, these figures were reversed for the women with only 19.7% of self-reported religious females reporting abuse compared to 25% for traditional and 38% for secular (Schein et al., 2000, pp. 670–671).

A further Israeli study interviewed 906 Israeli adolescents aged 14–17 years who reported a 3.3% rate of CSA. The rate was slightly higher for Jewish respondents at 3.6% and lower for Arabs at 2.3%. There was also a higher risk for girls than for boys (Mansbach-Kleinfeld et al., 2015, p. 74). The study sample did not include ultra-orthodox Jews because of poor response rates in the pilot stage (p. 71). The authors suggested that this relatively low rate compared to the Schein et al. (2000) study could be explained by a number of factors including the different definition of CSA employed, the fact that retrospective studies of adults tend to report higher prevalence rates, and also that the interviews were conducted at home rather than in the classroom and involved face-to-face questions rather than an anonymous survey which may have discouraged disclosure of abuse (Mansbach-Kleinfeld et al., 2015, pp. 75–76).

The third Israeli study interviewed 40 ultra-orthodox Jewish men aged 18–44 years old who had experienced sexual abuse by acquaintances such as educators or religious leaders, peers or older friends. The findings indicate significant under-reporting of sexual abuse in this cohort. Those who disclosed usually spoke to parents (mostly mothers), educational-religious leaders and friends. Some only disclosed many years later. The relative silence reflected cultural mores including repressed views of sexuality, feelings of personal shame and stigma, and respect for authority figures who opposed public discussion let alone reporting to secular authorities (Zalberg, 2015, 2017).

The only empirical study outside Israel was conducted on 380 married orthodox or ultra-orthodox Jewish women aged 19–58 years in the USA. That study reported that 26% of the sample had experienced at least one incident of CSA, and 16% had been abused prior to the age of 13 years. The study authors acknowledged that the findings were not representative of all religious Jewish women given that they did not investigate CSA amongst religious Jewish women who were not married, or CSA amongst those Jewish women who were religious in childhood but no longer so (Yehuda et al., 2007). Additionally, the study did not refer at all to men who seem to be the majority of reported victims in ultra-orthodox Jewish communities. That phenomenon probably reflects the fact that male perpetrators have ready access to boys, but due to religious tradition are rarely left alone with girls who are not relatives (Katzenstein & Aronson Fontes, 2017).

Additionally, reports based on CSA arrests and convictions and data from victim support organisations outside Israel would suggest that the rates of Jewish CSA are not significantly different from those in the general population (Leshner, 2014; Lev, 2003; Zucker, 2005). For example, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice study of CSA within the Catholic Church reported that 40 American Rabbis had been publicly accused of sexual misconduct with adults and children (2004). Similarly, Resnicoff (2012, p. 288) argues on the basis of multiple media reports that there is 'increasing evidence' of CSA within ultra-orthodox Jewish communities in the USA, Israel and Australia. However, reporting rates within ultra-orthodox Jewish communities may be lower as is the case in some other ethnic and religious minorities reflecting the influence of cultural norms around preserving family honour and prioritising collective rather than individual well-being (Katzenstein & Fontes, 2017; Sawrikar, 2017).

Prior to the RC, there had been no significant studies of CSA within Australian Jewry. However, the Deputy Commissioner of the Victorian Police, Graham Ashton, informed the Victorian Government Inquiry Into The Handling Of Child Abuse By Religious And Other Organisations discussed above that the police had identified 69 offences (i.e. criminal convictions for sexual abuse of minors) in the Melbourne Jewish community involving 18 distinct victims from January 1956 to June 2012 (Ashton, 2012, p. 6). No detail was provided on the chronological breakdown of the crimes or the organisations involved. Nevertheless, a contemporary report by a Jewish communal activist detailed the experiences of 11 alleged Jewish victims of CSA and quoted a spokesperson for the Victorian Police as referring to 15 discrete cases being under investigation at that time (Rose, 2011). This limited available evidence suggests that institutional CSA may have occurred across a spectrum of Australian Jewish organisations and that Jewish victims – ultra-orthodox and otherwise – may be reluctant to disclose.

The RC findings

In this section, we examine the investigation processes, findings and recommendations of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse into two ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations with some reference to similar events and scholarly and popular literature from other jurisdictions. The RC was established in January 2013 by the Australian Labor Government to investigate how various institutions including schools, religious organisations, sporting clubs and government organisations had responded to allegations and instances of CSA. In February 2015, the RC held a two-week public hearing to examine the responses of two Jewish institutions to allegations of CSA: the Yeshivah Centre and Yeshivah College in Melbourne, and the Yeshiva Centre and Yeshiva College in Bondi, Sydney. Those findings were published in October 2016 as Case Study No. 22. In March 2017, the RC conducted a further review of the two institutions that incorporated evidence from a range of Jewish lay and religious leaders in NSW. That review was published as Case Study No. 53 in December 2017.

Due to space limitations, the discussion that follows will principally cover the Yeshivah organisations in Melbourne. The RC also reported that 25 Jewish survivors of CSA had detailed their experiences in private sessions. Of these 25 cases, 15 referred to the two schools known as Yeshivah Melbourne and Yeshiva Bondi (RC, 2017a). The other cases were not revealed publicly but can be assumed to involve mainstream Jewish organisations. Notably, they were not examined by the RC, and the RC did not provide any wider estimate of rates of CSA in the Jewish community. Nor did the RC investigate CSA at the ultra-orthodox (non-Chabad) Adass Israel School in Melbourne whose former Principal, Malka Leifer, allegedly abused 15 female students from 2000 to 2008 before the community leadership sent her back to Israel (Stewart, 2017).

The RC indicated that 15 males had been subjected to CSA by males (mostly of adult age) within the two Chabad-affiliated organisations. Their average age at the time of initial abuse was 11.3 years. Most of the perpetrators were teachers, but others included Rabbis and support staff at the institution or volunteers. These events took place from about 1984 to 1992 (RC, 2016, 2017a).

A total of four survivors presented evidence concerning their experiences of CSA at Yeshivah Melbourne and Yeshiva Bondi: Manny Waks who remains the only Jewish male CSA survivor

in Australia to publicly reveal his identity; AVA; AVB and AVR. AVB's wife, AVC, also presented evidence concerning the impact of the Yeshivah's response on survivors and their families as did AVA's mother, AVQ. Additionally, 11 representatives of the two organisations including nine Rabbis presented evidence (RC, 2016).

In Melbourne, two men were identified as responsible for multiple counts of CSA: Shmuel David Cyprys and Rabbi David Kramer, although it should be noted that they were not the only adults to abuse children at the Yeshivah (Waks, 2016). Cyprys appears to have been an employee and/or volunteer at Yeshivah Melbourne from approximately 1984–2011 filling various roles including caretaker, security guard, locksmith and martial arts instructor. Cyprys had been found guilty in September 1992 of an indecent assault in 1991 but was placed on a good behaviour bond, and no conviction recorded. The RC report acknowledges that 'it is unclear whether Yeshivah Melbourne were aware of the 1992 court proceedings and the plea that Cyprys entered' (RC, 2016: p. 23), although Zephaniah Waks, the father of Manny Waks, recalls the details being widely discussed at that time in the Yeshivah community (Waks, 2016).

Cyprys was later charged in 2011 with 16 counts of indecent assault and 13 counts of gross indecency alleged to have been committed against 12 boys aged 7–17 years. He was found guilty in August 2013 of multiple counts of rape and other CSA offences and sentenced in December 2013 to 8 years imprisonment with a non-parole period of 5 years and 6 months (RC, 2016).

Rabbi David Kramer was employed as a teacher at Yeshivah College from 1989 to 1992 and summarily sent home to America by the Yeshivah leadership on a paid airline ticket following multiple complaints from parents of alleged CSA (Waks, 2016, pp. 149–152). He was subsequently sentenced in the USA to 7-year imprisonment for CSA offences committed in March 2007. He was later extradited to Australia in November 2012 and sentenced to 3 years and 4 months prison in July 2013 for multiple offences against four students from January 1990 to December 1991 with a non-parole period of 18 months (RC, 2016; Waks, 2016).

Analysis of the commission reports finds that the contemporary organisational response to CSA allegations was more likely to involve either denial or inaction resulting in further abuse of children. The events concerning Cyprys appear to have been reported to the Yeshivah leadership either at the time or in subsequent years by CSA survivors and their families. In practice, this primarily seems to have involved reporting concerns to the Head Rabbi (Groner) who held the position from 1959 till 2007 and had principal oversight of complaints concerning CSA. For example, Manny Waks reported the details of his abuse by Cyprys to Groner in 1996, and again in approximately 2000 (Waks & anonymous others, 2012, 2016). Survivors were advised by Rabbi Groner that action would be taken to protect children from further harm, but little if any action was taken, and there does not appear to have been any official documentation of the complaints, or formal process for responding to the allegations. Cyprys was allowed to continue to have access to, and potentially sexually abuse, children. As noted above, the Yeshivah did act on Kramer by quietly sending him back to America, but the response was less than adequate. There was no report made to the police, and Kramer was once again given access to children through his transfer to America. There is no record of further action being taken, counselling or other remedial action that prevented further abuse from occurring and provided some sense of justice for the victims (RC, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Waks, 2016).

Nevertheless, the RC does not report any further allegations of CSA at Yeshiva beyond approximately 1992. This raises the unanswered question of whether further CSA took place at Yeshiva after 1992 but has not yet been reported; or alternatively, that no further CSA occurred. If the latter is correct, it would suggest that even though Yeshiva admitted that no formal child protection policies were introduced till 2007 (RC, 2016), the organisation took some informal action after 1992 to discourage access by potential perpetrators to children.

The RC presented four major findings and associated recommendations pertaining to the particular vulnerability of children within ultra-orthodox communities linked to the absence of sex education, the reluctance of community leaders to report CSA allegations to child protection authorities or the police; the overt hostility displayed by the community towards CSA survivors who had spoken to police; and the failure to adequately apologise to or compensate CSA survivors.

Firstly, the RC suggested that the absence of sex education within the Yeshivah school curriculum and community may have contributed to the particular vulnerability of students to perpetrators, the reluctance of victims to disclose, and also the failure of the organisation's leadership to understand the long-term negative impact of CSA on the well-being and mental health of victims. They specifically quoted a statement from Rabbi Yosef Feldman, the student supervisor at the Yeshiva Gedola Rabbinical College in Sydney and President of the Rabbinical Council of NSW, which revealed that he did not understand either the criminal nature of CSA, or mandatory reporting obligations in NSW concerning CSA (RC, 2016, 2017a; 2017b). That concern is consistent with international literature identifying that ultra-orthodox communities seem to be particularly vulnerable to CSA because of multiple factors including the absence of sex education as a protective mechanism that may help to facilitate disclosure (Pelcovitz & Mandel, 2011; Waks, 2017), associated sexual repression despite the absence of celibacy requirements for Rabbis, the regular use of the male mikveh (ritual bath house) (Melchior & Waks, 2015), and also patriarchy/gender inequity within communal leadership and decision-making bodies which shield predators from exposure. Consequently, the RC urged that all religious institutions provide age-appropriate sexual education that enables children to develop self-protective knowledge and skills (RC, 2017a).

Secondly, the RC noted that there was a strong perception in the Yeshivah community that Jewish religious law known as *Halacha* did not support the reporting of CSA to outside authorities. This approach reflects a range of religious beliefs involving concepts such as *Mesirah* (i.e. a Hebrew word which refers to the Rabbinic injunction concerning informing on Jews to external non-Jewish authorities with a threat of the death penalty for those whom infringe that are labelled *Mosers*) and *loshon horo* (i.e. a Hebrew term which designates as sinful negative talk or gossip about other Jews or Jewish organisations) which are still upheld by many ultra-orthodox groups (RC, 2017a; Salamon, 2011).

There seems to be a contradiction here between public statements by Jewish leaders and private communications and deeds. On the one hand, there has been many statements by Jewish religious leaders within and beyond Australia advising Jews to directly report CSA allegations to public bodies. For example, in 2010, the Rabbinical Council of Victoria issued a public resolution advising that *Mesirah* did not apply to CSA and that Jewish law in fact required the reporting of CSA to civil authorities (RC, 2016, 2017a). Internationally, there has been numerous

statements by Halachic authorities such as Rabbi Mark Dratch (Chairman of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America's (RCA) Task Force on Rabbinic Improprieties) (Dratch, 2009), and others within the RCA including Rabbi Yosef Blau (Senior spiritual supervisor at Yeshiva University) affirming that mandatory reporting is fully compatible with Jewish religious teachings (Blau, 2017; Brofsky, 2017; Cohen, 2011; Dorff, 2003; Salamon, 2011). In August 2016, 300 Orthodox Rabbis in the USA signed a public statement urging the reporting of CSA allegations to secular authorities, and repudiating attempts to silence Jewish victims of CSA (Schere, 2016), and in September 2017, seven leading Chabad Rabbis from Australia, Argentina and the USA issued a statement recommending the prompt reporting of CSA allegations to civil authorities and condemning any ostracism of victims or their families (Anonymous, 2017).

On the other hand, there have been many examples of contrary transmissions of information. A survey of ultra-orthodox Rabbis in Israel revealed that a large majority opposed CSA victims reporting offences to the police (Melchior & Waks, 2015). An advertisement placed in a Brooklyn newspaper by 50 ultra-orthodox Rabbis forbid any reporting of CSA to the police and threatened death for any Jewish informers (quoted in Neustein & Leshner, 2009). A 2011 resolution by the leading ultra-Orthodox organisation in the USA, Agudath Israel of America, urged that CSA allegations be adjudicated by a Rabbi or a Rabbinical Court known as a Beth Din. Yet most Rabbis lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to assess whether or not CSA has occurred (Berkovits, 2017; Resnicoff, 2012), and many may have direct conflicts of interest (Katzenstein & Fontes, 2017) given that alleged perpetrators could be friends or neighbours or even family members. Nor are they able to arrest or punish offenders whom they judge to be guilty, or prevent further abuse occurring (Salamon, 2011). In one notorious case in Brooklyn, a Rabbinical Court formed by the Bobov Hasidic sect successfully persuaded the District Attorney to withdraw charges of CSA against a prominent Hasidic Rabbi (Neustein & Leshner, 2008). In another case, over 100 ultra-orthodox Jews threw missiles at the home of a young girl in London who had given evidence in a case of sexual assault against a Rabbinical student, whilst screaming 'informers' at her family (Neustein, 2009).

According to the RC, leaders of the ultra-orthodox organisations privately advised community members that Jewish law precluded the reporting of CSA to secular authorities, and consequently discouraged some CSA survivors from reporting to authorities (RC, 2017a). One leading figure in the Yeshiva Centre in Sydney, Rabbi Yosef Feldman, who admitted to a friendship with child abuser David Cyprys and a concern to defend Cyprys from allegedly unfair treatment, openly argued in an email to other Rabbis in NSW that CSA complaints should be judged firstly by a Rabbi. To be sure, Feldman's argument was publicly rejected by most other Rabbis. In response, the RC urged all Jewish community leaders via Recommendation 16.30 to assure members that halachic concepts such as *Mesirah* and *loshon horo* did not apply to, or contradict an obligation, to report CSA to outside authorities (RC, 2017c).

Thirdly, Yeshivah leaders did not support CSA survivors and assist them to report allegations to legal authorities. Rather, they attempted to silence them.

Those survivors who made complaints to police and their families seem to have been exposed to religious and social isolation and bullying, or what is called 'shunning' (RC, 2016, p. 6; 2017a, pp. 171–172; 2017b, p. 27200).

In the case of Manny Waks, public statements made by the Head Rabbi of Yeshivah, Rabbi Telsner, in 2011, appear to have led to the re-victimisation of not only Manny, but also his parents who remained active members of the Yeshivah community. Telsner questioned who had given Yeshivah community members permission to discuss CSA outside the community. It is unclear whether this sermon was a direct attack on Waks for speaking to the media, or a broader attack on any CSA survivors who publicly communicated their experiences. Regardless, it was viewed as an attempt to intimidate survivors (RC, 2016; Waks, 2016; Waks & Waks, 2012).

Telsner was also perceived to have attacked another CSA survivor known as AVB who sent an email to Jewish friends and acquaintances urging them to cooperate with police investigations into David Kramer. In a June 2011 sermon, Telsner labelled this action as sinful slander or *loshon horo* using a biblical analogy from the Torah (RC, 2016, p. 45). Furthermore, Rabbi Klugant, a prominent Chabad leader who was both a chaplain to the Victorian Police and an employee of Yeshivah Melbourne, directly rebuked AVB for sending the email. These actions by Telsner and Klugant were identified by the RC as likely to deter CSA survivors from reporting their experiences to the police (RC, 2016, 2017a). Additionally, AVB's wife later reported being exposed to widespread isolation and abuse within the Yeshivah community including verbal attacks and loss of friends. Her husband was treated as an outcast resulting in his car being vandalised and also being subjected to a mild physical assault (RC, 2016, 2017a; Waks 2016).

The ostracism of CSA survivors in Melbourne is consistent with events in the USA, whereby numerous CSA victims and their families in ultra-orthodox Jewish groups have been victimised and threatened by community members. Forms of harassment have included economic boycotts (Katzenstein & Fontes, 2017), expulsion from synagogues (Leshner, 2014), some examples of physical violence (Resnicoff, 2012), and in many cases exclusion from the community to which they belonged (Leshner, 2014). For example, a Hasidic community in the USA initiated a major fundraising appeal to support the legal costs of an accused Rabbi who had been convicted of repeatedly raping a young girl. The community also explicitly punished the victim for informing the police by expelling her young nieces from local religious schools (Leshner, 2014). This behaviour by communities aligning with the perpetrators rather than the victims has caused further trauma to CSA survivors (Neustein & Leshner, 2009).

A fourth concern was poor governance and leadership. The RC noted that Yeshivah College Melbourne did not introduce any formal policy, processes or practices for responding to CSA concerns until 2007. Attention was also drawn to conflicts of interest given that many of the Yeshivah leaders were longstanding friends or neighbours or had close family connections. The RC recommended that all organisations introduce a policy covering conflicts of interest in relation to the handling of CSA complaints (RC, 2016, 2017a).

Finally, Yeshivah Melbourne did not introduce a formal redress policy to compensate CSA victims. To be sure, the Yeshivah offered a short-term redress scheme which operated for only 13 months and provided assistance including counselling and monetary compensation to 10 victims (RC, 2017a). Additionally, Yeshivah offered a muted generic apology to the Yeshivah community in August 2012 for 'any historical wrongs that may have occurred' (p. 195). But the RC argued that the organisation should have offered direct and personal apologies accompanied by care and support to all victims for the trauma caused by CSA and

the inadequate response to their complaints (RC, 2017a). Nevertheless, in 2019, Yeshivah joined the national redress scheme established by the Commonwealth Government.

Policy and practice implications for ultra-orthodox Jews and other faith-based communities

The findings of the RC case study concur with our earlier review of the limited existing literature that rates of CSA within Jewish organisations appear to be similar to those in the broader community. They are also conversant with evidence concerning key risk factors in other faith-based communities. One factor is the perceived authority of religious leaders, which allows them to operate without challenge or accountability (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, p. 50; McCloone-Richards, 2012). This factor was apparent at Yeshivah in the blatant perpetration of CSA by school employees, and the poor governance standards which contributed to the failure of key leaders to take action to prevent further abuse (RC, 2017c, p. 56, 59).

A second factor is religious doctrine that tends to elevate traditional religious practices and the importance of self-governance over effective policies to protect children from CSA. This includes a failure to introduce procedures that prevent suspected abusers from having access to children and patriarchal hierarchical structures that exclude women from leadership positions and the opportunity to be involved in decision-making around CSA concerns (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, pp. 50–51). This factor was evident in the absence, within the two ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations, of formal documentation or a system for responding to CSA complaints, the subsequent denial and/or cover up of multiple examples of CSA, the failure to support victims or to encourage reporting of CSA to police, and the refusal to censure community members who ostracised CSA survivors.

A third factor is a repressive attitude towards sexuality and the sexual education of children. The decreed celibacy for Catholic priests (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, p. 50) does not apply to ultra-orthodox Jews or most other faith-based communities. Nevertheless, the group norms that operate within the Yeshivah community to inhibit discussion about body parts and sexual activity (Feit, 2013; Epstein & Crisp, 2018) seem to have limited identification of, and appropriate responses to, manifestations of CSA.

Conversely, there are arguably a number of lessons from the RC case study that can inform improved child safety practices and prevention of CSA within ultra-orthodox Jewish and other closed faith-based communities. Firstly, it is crucial that governments require such communities to adhere to formal child protection policies and protocols including mandatory reporting of abuse (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, pp. 53–54; McCloone-Richards, 2012). It is essential that the assessment of CSA allegations is conducted by independent professionals, rather than via community leaders (Lopiansky et al., 2017). Secondly, the active screening of potential perpetrators is vital in order to limit their access to children (Lopiansky et al., 2017; RC, 2017a). Additionally, the education of religious officials is important, including regular specialised training of leaders, employees and volunteers (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, pp. 51–52) as noted by the RC (RC, 2017c, p. 59). Thirdly, training needs to be culturally specific to address particular religious concepts that may influence reporting of CSA and community responses (Epstein & Crisp, 2018). Within ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, culturally sensitive community education programs will need to use a range of methods including

social media, websites, social events and workshops to effect attitudinal change in parents, teachers and religious leaders towards addressing and speaking about CSA. This will require a nuanced approach to advance community awareness of the existence of CSA, its significant negative impact on victims and their families, and the benefits for the whole community of providing professional assistance to those abused (Zalberg, 2017).

According to Robinson and Hanmer (2014), religious authorities are likely to be most influential in reforming religious beliefs that downplay the impact of CSA and/or the value of reporting. The RC case study of Yeshivah identified Halacha (Jewish law) as a crucial variable to be addressed, whilst other faith-based communities will have their own unique context. Finally, it is important that children in religious organisations are enabled to participate in age-appropriate sex education to inform their awareness of body parts, and the difference between appropriate and unsafe contact (Lopiansky et al., 2017; RC, 2017c).

A further question is how to assist professionals to overcome cultural, religious and psychological barriers to reform within faith-based communities. Some studies have identified the major role that group membership and loyalty appears to have played in decisions by faith-based communities to defend or identify with the abuser, rather than the victim. For example, Minto et al. (2016, p. 2) suggest that the 'black sheep' label tends to be applied to the victim, which leads to a skepticism about CSA allegations. Similarly, Harper and Perkins (2018) argue that community members may align with the perpetrator rather than the victim in a misguided attempt to protect their institution. This seems consistent with the RC Case study whereby it was mostly the victims rather than the abusers who were censored and threatened with exclusion from their community.

However, Harper and Perkins (2018) argue that an alternate approach to faith-based communities would reframe allegations of CSA in a manner that convinced group members that taking action to prevent CSA was more likely to preserve the existing religious system and practices. One particular theme could be that preventing CSA would lessen the prospect of young people losing their faith and leaving the community. This rejection of religion has been identified as a major threat in ultra-orthodox Jewish communities (Lopiansky et al., 2017, p. 33) but would also apply to other faith-based communities.

Conclusion

The RC findings regarding the absence within the two ultra-orthodox Jewish organisations of formal documentation or a system for responding to CSA complaints, the subsequent denial and/or cover up of multiple examples of CSA, the failure to support victims or to encourage reporting of CSA to police, and the refusal to censure community members who ostracised CSA survivors are all consistent with previous behaviour in other ultra-orthodox communities (Berkovits, 2017). They also indicate major commonalities with other faith-based communities in that the needs of the institution and/or the perpetrators were given precedence over supporting CSA victims and their families; and patriarchal structures appear to have contributed to the failure of these institutions to introduce effective child safety measures (RC, 2017c).

The RC has identified a range of badly needed child safety reforms for all faith-based communities investigated pertaining to specialised (and preferably culturally specific) CSA training for leaders, governance reforms to ensure compliance with child safety codes and accountability to scrutiny by both communal

membership as well as external bodies, and age-appropriate sex education as a protective factor for children. There is also a need to reform patriarchal hierarchical structures based on religious knowledge and standing that exclude women from key decision-making processes around addressing the causes of or prevention of CSA (RC, 2017c).

To be sure, the RC case study has some limitations. As noted earlier, it is not representative of most Australian Jewish organisations and communities, or even of all ultra-orthodox Jewish communities in Australia. There remain major differences between secular, progressive, modern orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jewish communities in their approach to CSA. Further research is needed on the prevalence of CSA in Australian Jewish organisations of all religious and cultural variations pertaining to both boys and girls in order to examine how those organisations responded to allegations, the associated experiences of Jewish CSA survivors and their families, and the commonalities and differences between Jewish experiences and those of other faith-based communities.

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