



Presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science by One in Four regarding the Education (Supports for Survivors of Residential Abuse) Bill 2023

Introduction

One in Four provides psychotherapy and advocacy support to men and women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and to their families. We also offer a prevention programme to people who have caused sexual harm to children. Working with an average of 700 clients per annum, we have a deep understanding of the long-term impact of childhood trauma on the individual. We recognise that a particular set of supports are needed by survivors who may be very vulnerable as a result of their childhood experiences.

The Education (Supports for Survivors of Residential Abuse) Bill 2023

One in Four broadly welcomes the proposed Bill and believes that, if enacted, it will provide a structured support system to survivors of residential abuse. We welcome in particular the provision of health services without charge, including free GP care, free medicines and surgical appliances, a free nursing service, free home help, free dental, ophthalmic and aural services, a free counselling service, a free chiropody service and a free physiotherapy service.

However, we identify several omissions in the proposed legislation:

- In the absence of a designated support agency, many survivors will have difficulty in accessing information about their entitlements, negotiating any roadblocks they may encounter and in identifying appropriate services. Some survivors have a low educational attainment and may be suffering chronic complex PTSD. Some will not have the confidence to be assertive in claiming their entitlement. There is a vital need to provide for a professional advocacy service to assist survivors to avail of the proposed supports.
- While it is very welcome that counselling services are identified as a necessary support, the reality is that all the specialised counselling and psychotherapy organisations are unable to meet the demand for services. For example, at One in Four the waiting list for psychotherapy is over 1 year and the same is true for the network of Rape Crisis Centres and for the National Counselling Service. Survivors of institutional abuse deserve to have timely access to well-trained, experienced trauma psychotherapists and counsellors and no provision is made for this in the Bill.
- Many survivors still experience shame and stigma associated with their childhood experiences and will not always feel able to identify themselves as survivors to front-facing staff in the health services. All medical and public service staff working in front-line roles

should be afforded trauma-informed practise training so that they can identify survivors and be aware of the different specialist supports they may need.

- In relation to survivors overseas, it seems to us that the €3,000 allowance they may be offered is a relatively small sum and would not necessarily cover the costs of the health services in other jurisdictions that are provided to survivors resident in Ireland. It also will reduce in value over the coming years due to inflation. The sum of this allowance should not be specified in legislation and should be awarded through a needs-based assessment.
- Regarding the use of data, it does appear as if data will only be processed for legitimate purposes but additional thought needs to be given to the security of sensitive data as it moves from agency to agency. For survivors, their privacy concerns are very salient.
- We have always understood that many survivors dread the possibility of ending their lives in a care home, provoking as it might traumatic memories of their childhoods in institutions. It would be useful if the Bill could include a section stressing that every effort would be made to ensure that in so far as possible, home help and nursing care would be provided for survivors in their own homes.
- No provision is made in the Bill for the provision of professional support for survivors who may be engaging with criminal or civil justice processes in relation to their alleged abuser.

Conclusion

This Bill is a welcome development in providing ongoing support to survivors of institutional abuse, enshrining in law their right of access to a variety of vital services. However, we consider that the Bill could be improved if the concerns raised above are considered. Survivors of abuse in institutional care were abysmally failed by the Irish state in their early years. It is incumbent on us as a society to ensure that, as they age, they are afforded the highest quality appropriate services that they richly deserve.

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