

Seeking participants: Survivors' Own Stories of Child Sexual Abuse

Our names are Dr Anna Gekoski and Professor Steve Broome and together we are researching and writing a book about child sexual abuse perpetrated by family members. If you are an adult survivor of such abuse and are available to be interviewed in the South East of England then we would like to invite you to be a part of this project.

Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether you wish to take part.

What is this book about?

In the UK today, it is estimated that around one in twenty children are subjected to sexual abuse. Furthermore, the vast majority are abused within the family environment. Yet despite how common this crime is, child sexual abuse within families – sometimes known as incest or intrafamilial child sexual abuse – still often remains shrouded in secrecy, shame, and stigma.

Being subjected to child sexual abuse can have a range of consequences and effects. Victims may feel confused, humiliated, guilty, traumatised, dirty, worthless, and angry. They can have low self-esteem, fear rejection and being used, and experience disturbed sexual functioning. Mental health problems – such as anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, eating and personality disorders – are also common.

In order to further our knowledge about the effect and impact of this type of child sexual abuse, we are seeking to interview adult survivors about their experiences of being abused and what impact this has had on their lives. We will then present these accounts, *told in survivors' own words*, in a book, which has been commissioned by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

We are looking for people from a diverse range of backgrounds and with a diverse range of experiences. This includes those who identify as any gender, of all ages above 18, of any ethnicity or religion, and from different social and economic backgrounds.

Research in this area is very important in order to help to fill in gaps about what academics, practitioners, and policy makers know about the nature and impact of child sexual abuse; help

practitioners devise new ways of helping victims; show survivors they are not alone; educate the public; and demystify the subject, reducing stigma. Your participation would be invaluable in helping to further knowledge about this subject.

What are the criteria for taking part in this study?

In order to be considered to take part in this book you need to be able to answer 'yes' to the following questions:

1. Are you now over 18 years of age?
2. Were you sexually abused as a child while you were under the age of 18?
3. Were you living in the UK when the abuse occurred?
4. Are you available to be interviewed in the South East of England?
5. Were you abused by a member of your family? By family we mean relatives such as a parents, grandparent, aunts or uncles, siblings, cousins, nieces or nephews. This includes members of the family who are not related by blood but also by marriage, such as a step-parent, or who are in a caring role such as an adoptive or foster parent.
6. Are you prepared to tell us about the impact that the abuse had on your life, whatever that may be for you?
7. Are you happy to be interviewed by a man? As an experienced researcher and interviewer, and also a qualified counsellor, Steve will be conducting the research interviews.

What does taking part in this project involve?

The first step is an informal telephone chat, so that we can ask you a few basic questions about yourself and your experiences. You can also ask us any questions that you may have.

If all parties are happy to go ahead, a face-to-face interview will be arranged with Steve at a mutually convenient time and place. The face-to-face interview is anticipated to take a minimum of two hours, as we will need to get quite a lot of details from you.

Unfortunately due to budgetary issues, we can currently only interview in the South East of England, due to travel costs.

At some point after the first interview, we will need to conduct a second, shorter, follow up interview, in which we may ask you to clarify certain aspects of your account or provide further details. This need not be face-to-face but can be by, for example, telephone or skype.

All interviews will be taped using an audio-recorder (not video) so that we can transcribe them accurately afterwards. After we have written up your account you will be able to read it and correct or change anything that you like, within a certain timeframe (to be agreed).

If I get in touch with you will I definitely be included in the book?

Simply because you make contact with us does not mean that you have to take part in the project; you may request further information and not want to take the process any further. Similarly, unfortunately we will be unable to include everybody who makes contact with us in the book. This is not only due to numbers but, as stated before, we are trying to recruit a diverse set of people, in order to take in the wide range of experiences of child sexual abuse by family members. This means that not everyone we speak to initially over the telephone will be interviewed at depth or included in the book. We can discuss this further with you in the initial phone call.

Will participation be anonymous?

Preserving your anonymity and confidentiality is of great concern to us and we will take every step to ensure that we protect you in this regard. You do not need to give us your full name, or even your real name, but we will need some secure contact details for you so that we can get in touch with you and send you your chapter to look at.

In your account, all details that might potentially identify you or others will be changed. For example, all survivors, offenders, friends, family and anyone else named by the interviewee will be changed and given pseudonyms. Names of places will also be changed. If you do decide to take part, you may also change your mind and withdraw from the project up until a set amount of time after the interview (timeframe to be discussed), without giving a reason.

Are there any negative consequences to taking part in this project?

There is some evidence that a minority of people may feel emotional distress as a result of taking part in this type of research, partly as a result of mentally reliving traumatic experiences. However, research has also shown that this distress is likely to be short term,

and many research participants also say that they benefited and that it helped them in some way, for example, in talking over their experiences and helping others.

If you feel that you need extra support or help as a result of taking part in this project, at the end of the interview process we will offer you a follow up telephone counselling appointment with Steve, where you can talk through any distress you may be feeling and he can signpost you to other future sources of support. At the end of the interview everyone will also be provided with a sheet with the contact details of organisations and charities who offer support in this area.

How are we qualified to conduct research of this type?

Dr Anna Gekoski is a researcher and a writer in the field of criminal psychology. She specialises in research on violent and sexual crime and has published articles about child sexual abuse in academic journals and was part of a large study commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner on intrafamilial child sexual abuse.

Professor Steve Broome is a researcher who specialises in mental wellbeing. He has co-authored, with Anna, a book of first person accounts of mental illness. He is also a fully qualified humanistic counsellor, with a particular interest in trauma.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would be interested in taking part in this research, or would simply like some more information, the first step is to make contact with us. You can contact Anna at anna@broomegekoski.co.uk or Steve at steve@broomegekoski.co.uk. You can also contact us on 07939 068989.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

With all good wishes,

Anna and Steve