



'But then again, in the end, I decided to apply for redress': stories of ambivalence from survivors of institutional abuse

Ingunn Studsrød & Elisabeth Enoksen

To cite this article: Ingunn Studsrød & Elisabeth Enoksen (2022): 'But then again, in the end, I decided to apply for redress': stories of ambivalence from survivors of institutional abuse, Nordic Social Work Research, DOI: [10.1080/2156857X.2022.2155217](https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2022.2155217)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2022.2155217>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 08 Dec 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 34




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

'But then again, in the end, I decided to apply for redress': stories of ambivalence from survivors of institutional abuse

Ingunn Studsrød  and Elisabeth Enoksen 

Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway

ABSTRACT

Historical abuse of children in institutional settings has increasingly been recognized as a serious issue requiring redress and reparations for survivors. This article explores the experiences of survivors of institutional childhood abuse, when they decide to apply for redress. Norwegian redress programmes are part of an international wave of survivor remedy and compensation. There is a lack of research on survivors' experiences in this area. Data for this study were derived from qualitative interviews with 11 claimants (aged 27 to 70) of redress programmes in Norway. When we explored how our research participants experienced advocating for and applying for redress programmes, we saw that the process leading up to the decision to apply was characterized by ambivalence. By applying the theoretical concept of 'victim capital', we investigated the experiences and rationale of participants' ambivalence during this decision process. Findings showed their ambivalence was centred around four themes: i) uncertainty of victim position, ii) doubt about responsibility, iii) scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources, and iv) hesitancy regarding monetary payments. As survivors seem to go through exhausting personal and social processes *before* even deciding to apply, we argue that information about programmes needs to be extensive, and that support during the process should be comprehensive.


KEYWORDS

Abuse survivors; compensation; institutional abuse; justice; redress programmes

Introduction

For over two decades, historical abuse of children in institutional settings has been a major issue in European countries (Council of Europe 2010) and beyond (Wright, Swain, and Sköld 2017). In at least 19 nations, abuse of children in care has become part of the political agenda (Sköld 2013). The General Assembly of the United Nations highlights survivors' rights to remedy and reparations, and it urges states to 'provide those who claim to be victims of a human rights or humanitarian law violation with equal and effective access to justice' (as cited in Council of Europe 2010, 5). Several states are dealing with claims from adult survivors, and more will address such claims in the future (Daly 2014; Lundy 2016; Sköld and Swain 2015).

Redress programmes are responses to failed social work politics and practices, and such programmes aim to give recognition and redress to victims and survivors (Studsrød 2018; Studsrød and Enoksen 2020; Wilde, Roets, and Vanobbergen 2019). Redress programmes have predominantly been the result of media exposure and campaigning rather than of academic knowledge (Karim 2020). Yet, the latter is needed to bring better theoretical understanding of how to improve responses (Karim 2020). With few exceptions (Karim 2020; Lundy 2016; Moore, Thornton, and Hughes 2017; Pembroke 2019), survivors are seldom interviewed about their

CONTACT Ingunn Studsrød  Ingunn.studsrod@uis.no

experiences of redress programmes and processes, so we have limited knowledge on how best to support victims, and what type of redress provides equal and effective access to justice. Norway stands out as a nation with unique politics of apology regarding timing, content, arrangement, the groups addressed, and the amount of money involved (Simonsen and Pettersen 2015) so Norwegian experiences are relevant to child and family social work internationally. This article aims to gain an in-depth understanding of survivors' lived experiences of advocating for and making the decision to apply to redress schemes. Because the data showed that campaigning for and entering redress processes was characterized by ambivalence, we explore the experiences and rationales of this ambivalence.

Context and background

There have been reports of child abuse in out-of-home 'care' in Norway for many years (NOU 2004:23), yet the process of setting up redress schemes first appeared around 2003. It started with intense media exposure of institutional abuse survivors. Survivors talked publicly about dreadful conditions in institutions for children. In 1997, Norwegian TV made a documentary (NRK Brennpunkt) where two survivors talked about severe abuse and neglect in 'Morgensol' residential care unit for years. They said they were in doubt for a long time about whether they dared to participate in the documentary, but they wanted to fight for justice and for governmental recognition. Like other survivors, their cases had been dismissed within the judicial system, partly due to rules of time limitation and partly due to the requirement for proof (Studsrod 2018). After a long and bitter battle, where institutional abuse survivors felt they were not believed by politicians, the two care leavers from Morgensol were finally offered 725 000 NOK in compensation from the municipality who placed them in care. Their effort paved the way for redress programmes in Norway, but not without a lot of stress, and also criticism from other survivors who argued that the amount of compensation these survivors had accepted was too low (Korneliussen 2008). Later, one national (NOU 2004:23), and eight regional investigations reviewed institutional abuse of children (Ericsson 2012). While not all institutions were characterized by neglect and abuse, and not all staff were involved in abusing children, all these investigations showed maltreatment of children in out-of-home care settings for years (Ericsson 2012). Consequently, survivors from various parts of Norway demanded recognition for their suffering, acceptance of responsibility, and monetary payment (Hanssen 2007/2008).

By 2018, around 76% of Norwegian municipalities had installed redress programmes on *ex-gratia* basis (Studsrod and Enoksen 2020). Programmes aimed to make amends in cases that did not conform to standard procedures within the ordinary legal system (Simonsen and Pettersen 2015). The programmes varied greatly, both in terms of organization, structure, and target groups, and what the municipality took responsibility for (Studsrod and Enoksen 2020). Most programmes followed the so called 'Stavanger Model', where survivors who suffered sexual abuse and repeated physical abuse received the highest payment (725 000 NOK), followed by physical abuse (500 000) and neglect (200 000 NOK) (Simonsen and Pettersen 2015; Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). However, some programmes only gave between 250 000 NOK and 200 000 NOK. Although the standard of proof was set lower than in ordinary law (Studsrod 2018), claimants had to give some sort of statement about their abuse experiences, since the amount of money they could be granted varied. Usually, only survivors placed in foster or residential care by a specific local child welfare service were entitled to redress. A few programs offered redress even if the child welfare service wasn't involved, covering abusive acts in a range of residential facilities, boarding schools and even in hospitals (Studsrod and Enoksen 2020). Claimants also had to send their claim to the right location at the right point in time, and document abuse and/or neglect within a certain deadline to gain redress (Simonsen and Pettersen 2015; Studsrød and Enoksen 2020).

Initially the Stavanger model had a broad aim, not merely paying compensation, but also strengthening the quality of current child protection services, giving survivors a new start in life,

and giving organizations responsible an opportunity to evaluate and learn from a difficult history (Stene and Blom 2012). Nonetheless, research indicates that the actual accomplishment of these aims varied, and that some survivors didn't receive a monetary award due to various reasons (Studsrød 2018; Studsrød & Enoksen, 2020).

Research review

All redress programmes have good intentions and carry potential for healing, recognition, apology and compensation (Daly 2014; Sköld and Swain 2015). Daly (2014) identified five elements that are important for survivors: participation, voice, validation, vindication, and offender accountability. Pembroke (2019) cites writers who argue that public acknowledgement of wrongdoing can be cathartic to survivors, inspire a first step towards healing and might build a sense of solidarity and empowerment with other survivors. Her research also shows that giving victims an opportunity to express their suffering, and confronting those responsible, feels therapeutic (Pembroke 2019). Money is probably not the primary goal of redress processes for many survivors (Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). Nonetheless, Daly (2016) recognizes three different aims of monetary payment, from a victim perspective: i) recognizing past abuse and an institution's wrongdoing; ii) offering support and assistance to survivors and their families and trying to bring closure and healing; and iii) recognizing the gravity and effect of the hurt and injury and offering an expansive form of rehabilitation and social welfare (Daly 2016).

However, despite positive intentions, redress programmes can involve unintended negative side effects. Also, since positive outcomes of redress processes cannot be guaranteed, procedural fairness is decisive (Pembroke 2019). It is important that the process itself is perceived as fair, positive, and empowering (Pembroke 2019; Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). Previous research highlights the importance of giving the opportunity of voice (Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). Many Norwegian programmes seem to offer face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations between case workers and claimants (Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). However, the purpose of this seems to be to inform the application rather than to meet the survivors need to be heard (Studsrød 2018). Pembroke (2019) shows that a hearing procedure in front of a judge or the panel of board members feels like being on trial. However, the Norwegian conversations seem less formal and more flexible and supportive (Studsrød 2018).

Research has demonstrated that the characteristics and qualities of these programmes can threaten equal and effective access to justice (Daly 2018; Pembroke 2019; Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki 2018; Studsrød and Enoksen 2020). It is also difficult and painful for survivors to reveal the details of abuse (Ericsson 2015; Pembroke 2019), and to risk not being believed (Simonsen and Pettersen 2007). The Swedish programmes ended up with a high proportion of rejections, despite the aims of the government (Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki 2018). Rejections may be perceived as yet another violation, signalling the insignificance of suffering and dignity.

Furthermore, although many survivors show remarkable resilience, trauma experiences are followed by significant vulnerability (Moore, Thornton, and Hughes 2017). Redress programmes might be a survivor's first disclosure of the details of an abusive childhood (Moore, Thornton, and Hughes 2017; Pembroke 2019). Claimants risk re-traumatization (Pembroke 2019), shame and stigmatization (Ericsson 2015; Pembroke 2019), and lack of sufficient support and care when going through the process (Pembroke 2019; Studsrød 2018). Although the level of proof required within the Norwegian programmes is low, caseworkers review case files to find evidence, and dismiss some claims (Studsrød 2018). Abuse is seldom documented in case files (Lundy 2011; Sköld 2016; Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki 2018). Since institutional abuse often leads to experiences of betrayal, loss of trust in others, fear of authority, powerlessness, and avoidance of reminders of abuse (Wolfe et al. 2003), the fact of being a survivor might cause ambivalence towards entering redress processes.

The role of victim capital in redress processes

Institutional abuse was, for a long time, met with negligence and disclaim of liability, and survivors must have *victim capital* to demand apologies and redress (Ericsson 2015). Ericsson (2015, 125) uses the term victim capital as a kind of symbolic resource, depending on how much the disadvantaged situation is ascribed to others, rather than to the victim themselves, or due to conditions outside the victim's control. Ericsson notes that a survivor's suffering is a required, but not a sufficient, condition for a person to possess victim capital. To function as victim capital, their suffering needs to be recognized (Ericsson, 2015). She also argues that

“The agency necessary to convert suffering into publicly recognized victim capital must be properly balanced. It must be forceful enough to bring the claims of the wronged group to the attention of the public and the authorities but not so forceful as to threaten the status of the group in question as weak victims”. (Ericsson, 2015:127)

The ‘ideal’ victim must insist that they were wronged but should not appear immoderate or demanding. Her theoretical concept will be used to explore the survivors’ experience of advocating for and entering the redress programmes.

Methods

A qualitative approach was employed in this study through in-depth interviews with 11 claimants.

Sample and data collection

Survivors between the ages of 27 and 70 (7 women and 4 men) were recruited through redress boards and through the LifeBack project.¹ All participants had applied to redress programmes and had received between 725,000 and 500,000 NOK in compensation. All except one, had applied a programme with similar rules to the Stavanger model. Three of the participants were involved in advocating for redress programmes. The interviews took place in 2014. A predeveloped guide directed the course of the interviews but was flexible and allowed participants to navigate the order of the topics and introduce subjects that they found important. The interviews lasted between 53 and 162 minutes, with an average of 95 minutes. The location of the interview was chosen by the participant due to the sensitivity of the topic. One was interviewed in a private conference room in a hotel, and one in a participant's private home. The rest took place in private rooms in public buildings (e.g. town halls, universities). The interviews were videotaped and transcribed into written text. Quotes were translated into English by the authors to ensure that the meanings or content of participants' narratives were well preserved (Kvale 2001).

Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used, starting inductively, to explore perceptions of entering the redress programmes. After the first reading, it became evident that participants narrated their considerations before campaigning and entering the redress process. We then examined the dataset again developed the overarching theme *ambivalence*. Then we categorized the meanings and source of the ambivalence. After several rereadings of the data, we identified four themes: i) uncertainty of victim position, ii) doubt about responsibility, iii) scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources, and iv) hesitancy regarding monetary payment.

Ethical considerations

Researchers respected the interests of vulnerable groups throughout the entire research process and were cautious about using characteristics that could give rise to unreasonable generalization (The

National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, NESH 2016). Although varying greatly, members of the participant group shared some common experiences. Participants reported multiple signs of resilience, such as long-lasting relationships, successful housing, employment and job careers, and educational attainment. Still, the group qualifies for membership in the population that The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, NESH (2016) guidelines state are ‘vulnerable’, thus needing special attention. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved our plan for processing personal data, and the design and research plan was also approved by the regional committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics (REK, nr. 2013/1774/REK vest). Possible risks were balanced against the benefits of the research for society and for participants. All data were treated anonymously, the names used were fabricated, and we followed ethical procedures in line with NSD and REK requirements. Among other things, we offered generous time for interviews and breaks, obtained written informed consent from all participants, and offered to call participants later for a talk. Professional follow-ups with therapists were arranged and offered free of charge, if needed.

Participants were given Visa cards (SpendOn) with a small amount of money (300 NOK) as compensation.

Results: Experiences of ambivalence when advocating for justice and entering the redress programme

Participants had varying experiences of the process that led to applying for redress. However, perceptions of conflicting feelings, beliefs and reactions were typical. Three participants: Arnold, Carl and Dora, had fought for years for recognition and justice and for the implementation of financial programmes. This advocacy group applied for the long-awaited programme. When municipalities had set up programmes, Arnold and Carl seemed more certain about their victim position, and about their personal and interpersonal resources when entering their claims. However, everyone – whether involved in advocacy or not – revealed prolonged doubts of responsibility, and hesitancy about the value of money. Although we prefer the term ‘survivor’, we use ‘victim position’ to describe the participants’ ambivalence towards seeing themselves as innocent and as victims who deserved redress for the abuse and neglect they suffered.

The second group of participants applied for redress after they had found out about the programme through friends and relatives, municipality boards, and media advertisements. This group talked about ambivalence to applying, and about careful consideration of possible costs and gains, and some handed in their application just before the deadline.

The analysis shows that both groups talked about i) uncertainty of victim position, ii) doubt about responsibility, iii) scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources, and iv) hesitancy regarding monetary payments although at different stages of the process. Dora was among those survivors advocating for years to have authorities acknowledge their responsibility and set up redress schemes. In an exchange with the researcher, she recalled:

Dora: It was a struggle . . . We had to confront the municipality, the lawyers, and politicians in [city name] [to convince them to set up a scheme], and I shouted out my meaning to them [if they rejected survivors’ redress]. But we were worried that we could be punished, too.

Researcher: Oh, in what a way?

Dora: I remember thinking, “This is going to be expensive for Norway; this is going to be costly for the municipalities, but it is great! However, what if they punish us? [. . .] What if they confiscate our social benefits?” We were certainly not tougher at the time.

Although Dora was pleased that municipalities would set-up redress programmes, she and others did not fully trust the authority’s response. Helen, who had not been involved in advocacy work, expressed similar mistrust; ‘You feel like you’re going to an executioner. No one is doing anything

bad to you. They want the best for you. But that's not how it feels'. Participants typically expressed an optimistic drive, alongside a doubtful mood and a troubled emotional state.

All participants reported a coexistence of conflicting thoughts about possible societal and individual gains and risks, positive and negative feelings, and mixed bodily reactions in campaigning for, and in deciding whether to enter the programme. These feelings and thoughts simultaneously drew them in opposite directions. Helen recalled a longer period of arguing back and forth and of reluctance and ambivalence before she decided to apply:

But then again, at the end, I decided to apply to the redress scheme So, then I called. I was so worried. I wanted to be as anonymous as possible. I wanted to be . . . I wanted to . . . I wanted to stand out, but I wanted to hide as much as possible.

When entering the programmes, a need for acknowledgement conflicted with desires for secrecy, fear was combined with bravery, disbelief balanced against hope, and so on. Hope of acknowledgement and a (monetary) award were mixed with fear, shame, distrust, and doubt. Anger towards others was combined with self-blame and shame. Participants hoped that positive gains would overrule the hindrances and probable negative outcomes.

j) Uncertainty of victim position

Most participants said it took years before they recognized the seriousness of their experiences, and they reported an uncertainty of understanding regarding their childhood experiences. Iris had experienced sexual abuse and other forms of abuse, including the abuse of animals, while in out-of-home care. She recalled:

I sort of thought it was not that bad. Everyone experiences something [bad] during their lifetime. I was thinking things like that. But when I started digging and pulling out memories and remembered things [...] Only in retrospect, did I understand that it was not normal at all, right? I didn't understand [...] We lived there and were in the middle of it [...] It took many years before I understood how weird it was [...] It took many years before I understood [that I experienced abusive care]. (Iris)

Participants showed that their previous understandings often had to change before they could apply. Although some had always defined their experiences as abuse or neglect, others did not comprehend the magnitude of the abuse they experienced as children.

Some explained that abuse experiences triggered an unwanted perception of being a victim or being negatively labelled and associated with a specific category of stigmatized people. Helen explained it:

So, I started to understand that maybe I was a part of this, in a way [sighs heavily]. And then I dismissed it because I did not want to go into it. I did not want to be . . . I wouldn't be a victim. It is very important for me not to be a victim. But to be strong and not broken down, but to stand tall. And I felt a bit ashamed to be a part of such a group of people. I did not want to be "that kind of people". I wanted to be normal.

They felt pain in the process of remembering and understanding the abuse that they had experienced as children. Campaigning and applying for redress schemes entailed including themselves within a stigmatized group as illustrated by Helen. Advocating and entering claims of redress trigger stigmatization and victimization, threatening their self-respect and self-worth.

Most participants had downplayed, forgotten, or repressed their memories of what happened to them in care. This meant that they first had to embark on a process of remembering, a process that many survivors described as very difficult.

I had chosen to repress it, everything that I had experienced through my 16 years in public care. But when the case suddenly emerged, it made everything come up again, and it has not yet landed [...] But you know I have never really talked to anyone about this, right? This is something . . . well, it is something you don't talk about, unless someone has been through something similar, and who has? I mean, the experiences are different. But I have always felt that this is not really something to sit around and talk about, right. So, it sits way back. My brother, he doesn't have a choice. He is so affected by this, he talks about it nonstop, but he doesn't remember anything. He just knows that he is in pain. (Britt)

Britt had repressed her own memories for years and was reluctant to talk about the abuse she had suffered. She got involved because she wanted to help her brother who had no cognitive memory of what had happened to him, although he suffered constantly. Another participant also talked about an awareness of the extent of the abuse that was more present in her body than in her mind.

So, I started to talk a little bit about it. And I started to remember, but there is still a lot I don't remember from back then. Abuse: You can feel it in your body that you have been subjected to more abuse than you can remember. And I had taught myself not to try to remember. But it came out then. And I know I have been exposed to more than I can remember. (Dora)

While narrating the need for and the importance of voicing their experiences of abuse and neglect in care, the process of remembering, feeling, and interpreting bodily reactions, along with acknowledging that 'this happened to me' was painful and triggered resistance. The process of remembering and acknowledging the full extent affected individuals negatively, both mentally and physically, and two participants also talked about suicide attempts.

ii) Doubt about responsibility

Claims of redress entail questions of responsibility. Placing responsibility was often complex, difficult, created resistance, and required great courage. Participants' experiences varied, but responsibility was usually placed on individual perpetrators, although few perpetrators had admitted their offences. Three survivors had filed reports with the police, and all of these were dismissed. Others were unable to, or reluctant to, confront individual perpetrators, for instance, because they were close to someone they didn't want to hurt, or the perpetrator had died. Moreover, responsibility was also placed on other actors, their parents, the agency responsible for their care situation and the municipality who were responsible for placing them in care, such as Frank who said he wanted to fill in claim because: 'The damn municipality was going to know what they had done'. Nonetheless, because so many people or organizations were seen as responsible, it sometimes was less obvious who to confront. Considering who to blame was sometimes more of a process issue, as reported by Helen:

If you are exposed to things, a lot of people blame themselves, and you think that if I had only done this or that, then maybe it wouldn't be like this. Or maybe you are told that it is your fault.

Perceptions of self-blame, guilt, disgrace, embarrassment, or similar were typical. Greta, who suffered sexual abuse, expressed embarrassment and shame when writing about the abuse in her application:

I almost did not want to include it in the application, actually, because I felt so embarrassed, and it was . . . it felt embarrassing to bring it up. And I sort of, I just still felt guilt from what happened. So well, I guess it was during the process that I had to realise that I . . . that it wasn't my fault. And that I dared to feel and think through it. I have kind of tried to repress it all the time and put a lid on it. I have felt shame, as a matter of fact.

Another participant, Jan, said that he excluded the worst forms of violence when he applied, because he doubted the board would believe it, and take responsibility for what happened. Carl was one of several children who, as a child, had also abused others. His feelings of guilt and shame made it very difficult to claim for justice and to enter the redress programme. He felt he couldn't place responsibility solely on others:

You cannot claim that you were just abused. You need to dare say that you were also one of those who abused others, that heavy load, right? And you know, that was the same for everyone who sat there; we were all perpetrators, but also victims. That is what you became; that is the way it was there [at the institution]. [. . .] You see a system that failed completely, and this formed the base of the redress programmes. And the society that has not done what it was supposed to do. [. . .] But still, there are things that were done to you, and what you did to others. So, it is still not easy to blame society for it. [. . .] I blame myself, I blame my parents, and I blame society. (Carl)

The feeling of responsibility for abuse caused Carl great pain. He acknowledged the destructive environment where he grew up and somehow realized that the children couldn't be blamed. However, making others accountable while at the same time feeling personally responsible, embarrassed, and ashamed illustrates the complexities of placing responsibility. Several participants showed doubt about placing responsibility and this caused ambivalence.

To apply, participants needed to know what happened to them as children. In placing responsibility on the institutions/instances that were responsible for their care, participants had to recognize possible errors in their childhood competence.

Because you don't really realise, before you're an adult, that you were just a child. When you're at that age, you may think you're an adult. But you're 12, 13. There is no adult insight in that child. At least not on my part. So, when I experienced it, and was present in the moment, I maybe didn't think so much about how wrong it was. I understand much better now that I'm grown up and read through what I have written about what happened. (Greta)

Greta and others had to become adults before they understood the severity of the maltreatment they suffered as children. It took time before participants understood what they experienced was wrong and not 'normal' and that they were *not* responsible. Only as adults and through the redress process, did they acknowledge that the blame, guilt, and responsibility they felt as children was not theirs to carry. However, this realization has not necessarily come easily. Helen explained the process of letting go of the responsibility:

Because that responsibility had been on my shoulders long enough. And deep down inside, I knew I had not done this. I was a child. Someone else did these things. [...] I want the responsibility to be taken away from me. Because I feel that I have carried the responsibility, and now I am a grown person, and I understand that the responsibility I have carried since I was six years old, it is not mine to carry. But when I try to place the responsibility, it leaps right back to me.

Inherent feelings were internalized or placed upon them as children. Although combined with an adult sense of being wrongfully treated, their understanding was still indecisive.

iii) Scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources

In choosing to campaign and/or apply for redress, participants had to trust their resources to handle various stresses and the negative influence this could have on their lives. Participants reported both access to and doubt about personal and interpersonal social resources.

Participants needed sufficient emotional, physical and cognitive resources to manage possible stresses. Ellen talked about how just talking about applying gave her considerable physical reactions:

And just from talking on the phone [...] about it, it started so much inside me. So, I went to lay down because I needed to prepare for what I had to do, and my entire body went into a cramp. My neck locked. My body was like, it just crawled up. The effect it had on me was completely unbelievable. I cried for an hour or so [...] It was like pushing a button. [...] It was just that one phone call and that immense bodily reaction, and then, I realised that the last thing I wanted was to sit down with someone and tell, like sit and cry my eyes out. That's the last thing I wanted to do. [...] I had so much resistance. But at the same time, it was the resistance that motivated me. Like, if I could do this, then maybe it would be okay.

Ellen reported that her intense physical reaction shaped resistance, but at the same time motivated her to apply. This illustrates how participants expect immense pain if they apply, although they hope the process may also help relieve pain.

Some didn't use much time writing up their statements, such as Ellen who just drew her application. Two others had been involved in the enquiries and they just sent in their testimonies. Klara had already written her full statement with the help of a solicitor, as she had reported it to the police. Others reported that they struggled writing their statements. Jan said he worked on the statement for a week; because he was so angry it was difficult to write what he thought was an appropriate statement. Britt helped with her brother's statement because he didn't remember what had happened to him in care. Greta said

I had still not written the thing you had to write, a sort of self-declaration. And I spent a lot of time on it. It was sort of a little difficult to write. [...] I started well. It sort of came easy what I was going to write. But then it got more and more difficult to get it down on paper. (Greta)

Participants needed to document in writing what happened many years ago, and they usually had no physical or tangible evidence now of the abuse that took place then.

It feels like you have to prove something that is very difficult to prove. Because it was maybe 20 years ago, 30 years ago. I don't know; it has been many years since it happened. So, it is not like you have, "Look here, I have a bruise here" or, "Look here, a broken arm!" It was a long time ago, what you have to write down or express verbally. (Helen)

Therefore, to be believed, they considered carefully what they disclosed and how. All but four got help later from someone on the board to verbalize their experiences. Typically, many reported fears of not having their stories substantiated. Moreover, to cope with the immense stress of applying, participants made use of black humour, irony, sarcasm, and conscious positive thinking.

Although some participants experienced a lack of support e.g. from partners, the majority reported resources in their social networks, from friends, siblings, or spouses, who helped, supported, and encouraged them to advocate or apply. This support helped them believe they could cope with the process.

I spoke to one of my friends about it at that time. And she encouraged me to at least think through it. Yes, to consider applying. But she did not force me or anything. The more she talked about it, the more I thought okay, maybe I can. (Iris)

Some asked for and received support from professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and social workers. Some even supported others, typically within the advocacy group. All support made the process more manageable. Survivors reported relying on resources in their network in the application process and were encouraged by the thought that they could be a support for others in the same situation. They were role models for others in similar situations, or, as in Britt's case, as a witness for her brother.

My motivation for sending the application was first and foremost as a supplement to my brother's application. When I read his application, I saw that he remembered extremely little from his early years, especially his first years at the children's home. (Britt)

The advocacy group which been involved in peer support groups felt it was meaningful, although emotionally stressful. It is evident from participants' various accounts that they felt ambivalent about whether they had the necessary support or resources to complete the application process. These conflicting feelings and thoughts seem to derive from doubts related to the potential social, physical, and mental pain and the practical difficulties of providing evidence.

iv) Hesitancy regarding monetary payments. Perceptions about monetary payments were complex. Some participants, among them Arnold, had advocated for financial compensation, not merely on behalf of himself but also of others in a worse condition. Arnold said he wasn't so concerned about the amount of the payment, but that the distribution of payment had to be fair. Nonetheless, he also believed the amount was important for others. The amount of money played a symbolic role in demonstrating that the responsible parties acknowledged the historical wrongdoings, the harms caused and took the responsibility. Helen said 'I was sort of driven by anger and motivated by justice . . . I felt, "Now it is time for someone to pay for this"'. She wanted someone to pay, symbolically, as she didn't know about the amount of money that was actually paid. Participants also revealed ambivalence about whether the monetary award was unreasonable/fair or deserved/incorrect. Helen said the money was, 'sweet but salty'.

There seem to be a tendency among the participants to believe they deserved financial compensation, although they argued it was impossible to weigh money against abuse and its consequences on their health. Hence, the achievable gains from the programme and the role of payment within

programmes was valued but limited. As Arnold explained money ‘can never erase your memories, and the way you live’. Although payments included contradictions, the possible monetary payment was perceived as valuable for several reasons. Britt was well educated with a stable income for years, she argues:

It is terrible, and I mean both confinement in basements and sexually related abuse. However, money can’t make up for it [...] Still money means a lot, that’s what we live on [...] I am fine, but I mean for most people who are unwell and poor. I’m not poor [...] But those who are poor, 500,000 doesn’t help, if you know what I mean. Instead, they should get free rent, free housing, and enough to live on, so they could live a decent life [...] and we live in a high-cost country, including the poor. Therefore, money is important. I do not look at it [money] as a patch on the wound. There is no amount that can replace a lost childhood. (Britt)

As Norway is a high-cost country, payments can ease difficult financial situations. Nonetheless some participants dismissed the worth of money completely, highlighting they were motivated by other means. Klara wanted to confront those responsible, and although she said she could use money to pay for education, emergency treatment, and psychological aid, she would rather have the money transferred into care ‘or respect’. Helen, like others, was motivated to apply because, as she argues ‘... then there would be someone who listens to it and hopefully (...) if I can save one child from experiencing that [abuse], then it’s great [talking with tears in her eyes]’. Others like Ellen said, ‘I believe that the monetary payments don’t belong in a redress programme at all. For me, it is all wrong. What should be compensated? List some things’.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the experiences and rationale of participants’ ambivalence when contemplating advocating for and applying for redress programmes. The results showed that their ambivalence was directed towards i) uncertainty about victim position, ii) doubt about responsibility, iii) scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources, and iv) hesitancy regarding monetary payments.

Compared to other groups, institutional abuse survivors meet the criteria of ideal victims with much ‘victim capital’ (Ericsson 2015). In acknowledging that society was accountable for their childhood suffering, it should be obvious that abuse survivors are entitled to redress and can apply with confidence. The advocacy group managed to convert their suffering into publicly recognized, but unstable victim capital. Participants were uncertain about their status as innocent victims, entitled to money, sympathy, and worthy of redress. Although some of the participants view these programmes as both deserved and long-awaited (cf. Hanssen 2007/2008), all participants are also afraid of the inevitable stress, as reported elsewhere (cf. Pembroke 2019; Sköld, Foberg, and Hedström 2012; Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki 2018). The findings imply that claimants thoroughly weighed up the potential of healing, recognition, and compensation against the risks of mistrust, shame, re-traumatization, and increased vulnerability *before* applying. Previous research has shown that many survivors of institutional abuse apply late and even after deadlines, which, in the latter case, may lead to rejection (Studsørød and Enoksen 2020).

We need to bear in mind that these findings are based on a qualitative design; hence, they are not generalizable. Data was only derived from survivors who had *already* been granted compensation. This may have influenced their perceptions and reflections. Another limitation is that we did not interview survivors who decided *not* to apply, or those whose claim was denied. All participants received the highest and second highest payment, showing that they had experienced several types of abuse, among them sexual abuse and serious physical abuse. Previous research indicates that individuals who suffer severe abuse seem more inclined to apply than individuals exposed ‘only’ to neglect (Studsørød and Enoksen 2020). Moreover, the interviews were conducted in 2014. Because of continuous media attention and reviews of more recent abuse scandals, and increased recognition of human’s rights, (Studsørød, 2019), we might expect that survivors today could be more confident

about their victim capital and less ambivalent to entering these processes. Yet, many survivors who suffered from serious shortcomings of the child welfare system still fight to be acknowledged as legitimate victims, and they still lack access to a coherent system of redress (Stavanger Aftenblad 2020). We therefore believe our participants' experiences are still relevant, but we might expect different experiences from different jurisdictions. Hence, more research with different designs, and in various contexts is needed.

Survivors experienced a lot of pain when confronted with the decision of whether to apply for redress, see themselves as victims, and take in the full extent of what they had experienced (Moore, Thornton, and Hughes 2017; Pembroke 2019; Simonsen and Pettersen 2007). To disclose past trauma, participants needed necessary resources, personally and interpersonally. They needed to believe they could gain something positive and meaningful from the process. Claimants have no assurance that they will be believed, respected, or granted money or an apology, as some applications are rejected and dismissed (Sköld, Sandin, and Schiratzki 2018; Studsrød 2018). The findings revealed that some survivors came forward because they wanted to help others in similar situations, hoping to prevent future abuse of children in institutional care. Claimants also found motivation in the act of standing up for themselves and finally telling someone what happened to them under the care of the state, as has also been argued previously (Ericsson 2015; Hanssen 2007/2008; Pembroke 2019).

Implications and conclusion

The findings provide knowledge for future redress programmes. The difficulties and doubts our respondents experienced when making the decision to apply, indicate that the information about redress programmes needs to be extensive, and support during the process should be comprehensive. The findings also highlight the diversity of survivors' needs, as suggested previously (Lundy 2016; Wilde, Roets, and Vanobbergen 2019), and the necessity for awareness and precautions regarding the potential social and psychological costs of such measures (Pembroke 2019). Our study imply that ambivalence is typical for survivors both advocating for and applying for redress programmes and related to i) uncertainty of victim position, ii) doubt about responsibility, iii) scepticism about personal and interpersonal resources, and iv) hesitancy regarding monetary payments. Redress processes should offer potential claimants the possibility of consulting social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and/or the equivalent before they apply. The window for applications should be lengthy, or there could be several windows, as some survivors need to go through an exhausting personal process before making the decision to apply.

Note

1. The LifeBack Project (PROPP, also called Project Reparation) was a Norwegian national resource and competence centre between 2007 and 2012 that had a good overview of the redress situation around the country. It had contact with individual claimants and with redress boards and used to have an internet site with information (www.propp.no), but the site has now been taken down.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Ingunn Studsrød  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8408-1706>

Elisabeth Enoksen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0805-7979>

References

- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a.
- Council of Europe. (2010). *Child abuse in institutions: Ensuring full protection of the victims*. Retrieved from <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17900&lang=en>
- Daly, K. 2014. *Redressing Institutional Abuse of Children*. London: Palgrave Macmillian.
- Daly, K. 2016. "Money for Justice? Money's Meaning Making and Purpose as Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse." In *The Sexual Abuse of Children: Recognition and Redress*, edited by M. Finnane, A. Kaladelfos, and Y. Smaal, 1–26. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing.
- Daly, K. 2018. "Inequalities of Redress: Australia's National Redress Scheme for Institutional Abuse of Children." *Journal of Australian Studies* 42 (2): 204–216. doi:10.1080/14443058.2018.1459783.
- Ericsson, K. 2012. "The Punitive Repertoire of Children's Homes and Reformatories." *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 13 (2): 76–93. doi:10.1080/14043858.2012.729354.
- Ericsson, K. 2015. "Victim Capital and the Language of Money: The Norwegian Process of Inquiries and Apologies." *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8 (1): 123–137. doi:10.1353/hcy.2015.0012.
- Hanssen, H. (2007/2008). "Abuse and Neglect in Children's Homes in the Past: Implications for Social Work and Social Policy Today". *IUC Journal of Social Work Theory & Practice*. 15(3). Published online. https://web.archive.org/web/20160706032924/http://www.bemidjstate.edu/academics/publications/social_work_journal/issue15/articles/hanssen.htm
- Karim, S. (2020). *Power and the historic abuse of children in care*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. Retrieved from http://digitool.lib.strath.ac.uk/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=33578
- Korneliusson, S. O. (2008). *Det jeg husker fra Morgensol er kulde*, ABC nyheter <https://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/2008/10/25/75873/det-jeg-husker-fra-morgensol-er-kulde>
- Kvale, S. 2001. *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Lundy, P. 2011. "Paradoxes and Challenges of Transitional Justice at the "Lokal" Level: Historical Enquiries in the Northern Ireland." *Contemporary Social Science* 6 (1): 89–105. doi:10.1080/17450144.2010.534495.
- Lundy, P. 2016. *Historical Institutional Abuse: What Survivors Want from Redress*. Ireland: Ulster University.
- Moore, J., C. Thornton, and M. Hughes. 2017. "On the Road to Resilience: The help-seeking Experiences of Irish Emigrant Survivors of Institutional Abuse." *Child Abuse Review* 26 (5): 375–387. doi:10.1002/car.2415.
- The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, NESH. (2016). *Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, humanities, law and theology*. Retrieved from https://www.etikkom.no/globalassets/documents/english-publications/60127_fek_guidelines_nesh_digital_corr.pdf
- NOU. 2004. *Barnehjem og spesialskoler under lupen. Nasjonal kartlegging av omsorgssvikt og overgrep i barnevernsinstitusjoner 1945–1980*. Oslo: Barne, og familiedepartementet.
- Pembroke, S. 2019. "Historical Institutional Child Abuse in Ireland: Survivor Perspectives on Taking Part in the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) and the Redress Scheme." *Contemporary Justice Review* 22 (1): 43–59. doi:10.1080/10282580.2019.1576130.
- Simonsen, E., and K.-S. Pettersen. 2007. "Både rett og rimelig- billighetserstatning og velferdsstaten." *Tidsskrift for velferdsforskning* 10 (2): 91–102.
- Simonsen, E., and K.-S. Pettersen. 2015. "The Politics of Apology: The Norwegian Case." In *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in Care*, edited by J. Sköld and S. Swain, 114–124. Oxford: Palgrave Macmillian.
- Sköld, J. 2013. "Historical Abuse – A Contemporary Issue: Compiling Inquiries into Abuse and Neglect of Children in out-of-home Care Worldwide." *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 14 (SI): 5–23. doi:10.1080/14043858.2013.771907.
- Sköld, J. 2016. "The Truth about Abuse? A Comparative Approach to Inquiry Narratives on Historical Institutional Child Abuse." *History of Education* 45 (4): 492–509. doi:10.1080/0046760X.2016.1177607.
- Sköld, J., E. Foberg, and J. Hedström. 2012. "Conflicting or Complementing Narratives? Interviewees' Stories Compared to Their Documentary Records in the Swedish Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and Neglect Institutions and Foster Homes." *Archives & Manuscripts* 40 (1): 15–28. doi:10.1080/01576895.2012.668842.
- Sköld, J., B. Sandin, and J. Schiratzki. 2018. "Historical Justice through Redress Schemes? The Practice of Interpreting the Law and Physical Abuse in Sweden." *Scandinavian Journal of History*. doi:10.1080/03468755.2018.1555100.
- Sköld, J., and S. Swain. 2015. *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in "Care"* *International Perspectives*, Eds. J. Sköld and S. Swain. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian.
- Stavanger Aftenblad (2020). *Mona Anita Espedal melder seg ut av Høyre – partiet svarer 27.11.2020*. <https://www.aftenbladet.no/lokalt/i/9OkaVq/mona-anita-espedal-melder-seg-ut-av-hoeyre-partiet-svarer>
- Stene, K., and H. Blom (2012). "Final report Prosjekt oppreisning 2007–2011". Unpublished
- Studsrod, I. 2018. "Utføre oppreisning: Saksbehandle søknader, støtte overlevende og konfrontere en samfunnsmessig skamplott." *Tidsskriftet Norges Barnevern* 95 (1): 18–36. doi:10.18261/1.1891-1838-2018-01-03.

- Studsrød, I. 2019. "Når du er i barnevernet, så er du litt sånn verdiløs 'Med sosialpedagogisk Praksis på Avvei'." In *Sosialpedagogiske Perspektiver*, edited by A. Lone and T. Halvorsen, 120–139. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Studsrød, I., and E. Enoksen. 2020. "Money as Compensation for Historical Abuse. Redress Programs and Social Exchange Theory." *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 13 (2): 288–306. doi:10.1353/hcy.2020.0039.
- Wilde, L. D., G. Roets, and B. Vanobbergen. 2019. "Challenging the Normative Truth Logic in the Politics of Apology; A Quest for Recognition." *British Journal of Social Work* 49 (3): 653–669. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy076.
- Wolfe, D. A., P. G. Jaffe, J. L. Jette, and S. E. Poisson. 2003. "The Impact of Child Abuse in Community Institutions and Organizations: Advancing Professional and Scientific Understanding." *Clinical Psychology-Science and Practice* 10 (2): 179–191. doi:10.1093/clipsy/bpg021.
- Wright, K., S. Swain, and J. Sköld (2017). "The Age of Inquiry: A Global Mapping of Institutional Abuse Inquires". Retrieved from <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/research/ageofinquiry/index.html>