

What victims/survivors of childhood sexual abuse expect of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Germany and of changes in society.

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The research adds to the activities of the Independent Commission to inquire into child sexual abuse in Germany

The Independent Inquiry into Sexual Child Abuse in Germany investigates all forms of child sexual abuse in Germany, such as sexual abuse

- in institutions
- by family members
- by social environment / neighbourhood
- in the context of organised crime

Based on the decision by the German Parliament, the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues (ICCSAI) appointed the inquiry team in January 2016 for three years until March 2019.

The Commission published an interim report in June 2017, and will publish a final report in spring 2019.

<https://www.aufarbeitungskommission.de/english-information/>

The activities of the Independent Commission to inquire into child sexual abuse in Germany

The members of the Commission work on a voluntary basis.

- Private sessions: 1.289
- Written reports: 252
- Workshop discussions on different topics: 5
- Public hearings: 3 (“Sexual abuse in families”, 2017, “Sexual abuse in the GDR”, 2017, “Sexual abuse in the Catholic and Protestant Church”, 2018)

Major objective: hold society and institutions accountable, hold politics responsible, advance *„Aufarbeitung“*

„Aufarbeitung“ in German is:

- coming to terms with the past,
- accepting responsibility for the past,
- resolving unresolved issues of the past and
- learning lessons for the future.

Research questions

- **What are victim's / survivors' expectations of politics and society?**
- **What do they expect the Commission to do?**
- **What do they understand by "*Aufarbeitung*"?**
- **What do they understand by "recognition"?**
- **(How) Can "justice" be achieved?**
- **What are their major needs, long-term burdens and continuous mental stress and what remedy can help?**

Data collection

Quantitative data:

316 questionnaires (1. online survey)

103 questionnaires (2. online survey)

Qualitative data:

51 qualitative interviews (44 women, 9 men)

7 group discussions (29 women, 5 men)

Sample of the questionnaire-surveys

- **85 % women, 11 % men**
- **between the ages of 18 and 74, on average: 50**
- **from all over Germany**
- **89% West, 11% East**

- **Context of the abuse**
 - **family (73%)**
 - **social environment/ neighbourhood (47%)**
 - **institution (boarding school, church...) (23%)**
 - **organised crime (20%)**
 - **ritual abuse (14%)**
 - **other/unknown (12%)**

Findings of the first survey

- **Goals were mainly seen as reasonable, but not necessarily as achievable.**
- **Goals would be thought of as „achieved“ when**
 - **victims/ survivors get adequate support/ therapy (89%)**
 - **children and adolescents in families are protected (81%)**
 - **all forms of child sexual abuse are taken seriously (80%)**
 - **victims/ survivors are no longer stigmatised (74%)**
- **To recognize suffering and injustice the Commission should prioritise naming not only the violent acts but also the impacts (88%).**

Findings of the second survey

- **Forms of media presence thought of as „most appropriate“ by victims / survivors:**
 - interviews with victims/ survivors (83%)
 - reports in factual (unemotional) terms (81%)
 - discussions with other experts (50%)
 - emotional and shocking reports (35%)
- **Focus of media coverage should be:**
 - impacts of sexual abuse (87%)
 - need for support and (trauma-)therapy (70%)
 - failure of state institutions (justice, compensation to victims) (53%)

Categories for interview-analysis

(1) The Commission validates what has happened

- The Commission believes the victim/survivor.
- Victims/survivors do not have to prove what cannot be proven (any longer).

(2) The Commission recognizes the effort of living a life under high psychological and mental stress and multiple burdens

The Commission should advocate:

- easy access to therapy,
- refund of therapy costs,
- securing of livelihood and compensation.

Categories for interview-analysis

(3) The Commission should initiate legal change

- Abolish period of limitation
- Advocate effective punishment of perpetrators

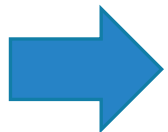
(4) Motives and goals of victims/ survivors

- Set an example for others
- Advocate self-help groups
- Advance political development
- Encourage removal of taboos
- Encourage public sensitivity
- Demand prevention

„Justice“

Justice is understood as

- holding perpetrators accountable,
- receiving adequate support, counselling and (trauma-)therapy,
- receiving financial support.



Unjustice cannot be undone, the question of justice therefore remains abstract.

„Aufarbeitung“

“Aufarbeitung” comprehends two meanings:

- 1) Individual coping – overcoming the impact of the abuse
- 2) Social coping – society and institutions ((boarding)schools / church) accept responsibility for failing to protect the children and covering up the crimes
- 3) Apologizing for what has happened and not having protected the children

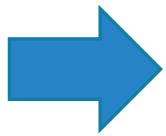


Individual coping is paramount for victims / survivors, but holding society and institutions responsible is also of great significance.

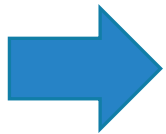
„Recognition“

“Recognition” is understood as

- recognition of suffering,
- recognition of injustice,
- recognition of strength and resilience.



Recognition is crucial and the adequate answer to stigmatisation and social marginalisation of victims.



Recognition is of relevance on two levels:

- Interpersonal contact
- Official recognition by (state)institutions

Yesterday the 3rd Public Hearing of the Independent Commission “Sexual abuse in the Catholic and Protestant Church” took place.