

The People's Tribunal: Empowerment by Survivors for Survivors of Child Abuse

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Abstract : This study explains how The People's Tribunal empowered survivors of child abuse. It examines how People's tribunals can be effective mean of empowerment; the challenges of empowerment - expectation v. reality; the findings and how they reflect other inquiry findings; and the importance of listening and learning from survivors. UKCSAPT "The People's Tribunal" was established by survivors of child sex abuse and members of civil society to investigate historic cases of institutional sex abuse. The independent inquiry, led by a panel of four judges, listened to evidence spanning four decades from survivors and experts. A common theme throughout these accounts showed that a series of institutional failures prevented abuse from being reported; and that there are clear links between children being rendered vulnerable by these failures and predatory abuse on an organised scale. It made a series of recommendations including the establishment of a permanent and open forum for victims to share experiences and give evidence, better links between mental health services and police investigations, and training for police and judiciary professionals on the effects of undisclosed sexual abuse. The main findings of the UKCSAPT report were:-There are clear links between children rendered vulnerable by institutional failures and predatory abuse on an organised scale, even if these links often remain obscure. -UK governmental institutions have failed to provide survivors with meaningful opportunities for either healing or justice. -The vital mental health needs of survivors are not being met and this undermines both their psychological recovery and access to justice. -Police and other authorities often lack the training to understand the complex reasons for the inability of survivors to immediately disclose a history of abuse. -Without far-reaching changes in institutional culture and practices, the sexual abuse of children will continue to be a significant scourge in the UK. The report also outlined a series of recommendations for improving reporting and mental health provision, and access to justice for victims were made, including: -A permanent, government-funded popular tribunal should be established to enable survivors to come forward and tell their stories. -Survivors giving evidence should be assigned an advocate to assist their access to justice. -Mental health services should be linked to police investigations to help victims disclose abuse. -Victims who fear reprisals should be provided with a channel through which to give evidence anonymously.

Keywords : empowerment, survivors, sexual, abuse

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