An examination of the leadership and governance responses of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders to Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA)

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Abstract

Minimal research has been undertaken into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA) within Jewish communities. Internationally, scrutiny has predominantly considered the ultra-orthodox sector of the community. The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse likewise focused upon the ultra-orthodox within their Jewish community reviews. No research to date has considered the far larger, mainstream Australian Jewish community leadership, nor their leadership practices, though it is broadly acknowledged, that institutional child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.

This is the first study to address this section of the Australian Jewish community regarding ICSA. It examines the responses of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders, regarding their leadership and governance relating to ICSA, between 2012-2024.

This qualitative study utilised a deductive process; data was analysed thematically, from which findings were developed. Results indicated leadership and governance deficiencies including minimal awareness of institutional child sexual abuse or communal concerns for survivors. Impacts of poor conflicts of interest practices, failure to drive changes to promote child safety and advance survivor support across the community were highlighted. The importance of greater communal support for survivors of late, has been noted.

Findings suggest the need to reform leadership and governance policy and practice within Australian Jewish peak bodies, including through enhanced internal governance and child safety education at a leadership level, to provide improved child safety and greater survivor

support across the community. Outcomes were found to be applicable to additional communities and cultures, including for example the Catholic church.

Keywords

Institutional child sexual abuse, Child sexual abuse, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Australian Jewish community, Governance, Leadership

Introduction

Global studies on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) consistently present CSA as a widespread concern, including that which takes place within institutional settings, known as Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA). To date, there has been minimal empirical research into manifestations of ICSA in Jewish communities, particularly in Australia. However, knowledge regarding the phenomenon of ICSA in the Australian context more broadly has been made available by two public inquiries, one conducted by the State of Victoria, known as the Betrayal Inquiry (2012-2013) (Family and Community Development Committee, 2013), and the other being the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA).

Widespread variation exists regarding definitions of CSA, along the lines of '…contact, violence and severity', (Sawrikar & Katz, 2018, p. 178), with the one definitive element identified being that of non-consent (Sawrikar & Katz, 2018). In Australia, the definition is further complicated, as each state has '…its own legislation and definitions of what constitutes CSA' (Kenny, 2018, p. 65).

In light of these variations, the RCIRCSA definition is utilised within this study, being: 'Any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards' (RCIRCSA, 2017a, p. 19).

This definition, which goes on to detail a series of abusive behaviours, including oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration, involving the child in pornography and child grooming in preparation for sexual activity (RCIRCSA, 2017a), has been selected above others, for a number of reasons. As detailed, by these include its association to the nuance of a child's comprehension, as well as an attachment to violation of community standards, linking CSA to a greater societal, ethical responsibility (Pinskier, et al., 2021).

ICSA occurs '…within the context of an institutional setting' (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016, p. 15), namely, a '…public or private body, agency, association, club, institution, organisation or other entity or group of entities of any kind (whether incorporated or unincorporated)' (RCIRCSA, 2017a, p. 324).

The direct effect of CSA may be temporary, but for many the harm is profound and lifelong. Survivors may experience impacts on physical and mental health, sexual behaviour, interpersonal relationships, spirituality and religious involvement, societal interactions, education, employment and economic security. Suicidal ideation, and suicide are also outcomes of CSA. The most common impact of CSA is on the survivor's mental health, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (RCIRCSA, 2017c).

Estimating the percentage of any population of sexually violated children proves a consistently difficult task. The two key sources of information, the perpetrators and the victims, are both typically averse to disclosure. Victims may be reluctant to disclose due to shame, and the emotionally charged nature of the experience. Barriers to disclosure exist in the instance of ICSA, whether in the instance of 'open institutions' (i.e. open to the wider community, such as religious organisations or communities), or 'closed' or 'total' institutions, (such as residential care, or orphanages) (Wright, 2017). Open institutions, particularly in religious, collective cultures, such as the ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, will commonly see victims silenced by religious leadership, or family, in the interests of reputational prioritisation (Sawrikar & Katz, 2018). Additional silencing by family, (or self-silencing) to avoid harming the social status, dignity and marriage capacity of both their own, and other family members forms a further barrier to disclosure (Elias, et al., 2019; Sawrikar & Katz, 2017; Elias, et al., 2019). (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017)In closed institutions, such as residential care, barriers may include fear following disbelief upon a previous disclosure, accelerated severity of abuse following disclosure, or lack of trust in the system to keep the victim safe (Kirkner, et al., 2024).

Studies suggest that only about half of victims ever report their abuse. Perpetrators are reluctant to do so in light of the risk of self-incrimination (Hidalgo, 2007). Variations in international prevalence estimates are further attributed to a lack of consensus regarding CSA definitions, along with differing methodological variables utilised in studies. Actual prevalence rates have been suggested to be as much as thirty times higher than registered in official government reports (Simon, et al., 2020).

Literature and empirical studies into CSA within minority communities in Australia remain virtually non-existent (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017). Averbukh et al. (2017) cites a speech presented at the Victorian state Betrayal Inquiry (2012-2013) by the Deputy Police Commissioner, Graham Ashton. He presented statistical estimates regarding prevalence of CSA offences within a number of faith based communities. Numbers suggested that given the relatively small size of the Jewish community, and the number of offences recorded, a greater prevalence of CSA existed in this community, compared to the Christian denominations within the state. Media reports of CSA within the Australian Jewish community do not form reliable measures, as cultural, social and religious practices may define acceptable behaviour differently to the broader society (Epstein & Crisp, 2018). Ultra-Orthodox communities are noted for a range of specific risk factors, including a cultural disinclination to report fellow Jews to secular authorities, which often leads to communal harassment and ostracism of the reporter, and a marked lack of sexual education, including language (Pelcovitz & Mandel, 2011) – both of which would be necessary to recognise, articulate and report abuse. The Jewish religion proscribes speaking ill of others, regardless of whether what is being said may be objectively true (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Further, within the hierarchy of these patriarchal communities, international concerns support the views that leadership charisma is also considered a liability, often allowing powerful individuals in the community, religious or otherwise, to enjoy underserved protection and promote silence on the part of the victim (Brown, 2009). All of these factors come together to serve as barriers to disclosure, and ultimately, prevent accurate interpretation of the prevalence of CSA within the Jewish community.

Among other ethnic, religious or minority groups in Australia, challenges to measurement of CSA include cultural issues and impacts regarding immigration status, language competence, child and family anxieties and fears, expectations, disclosure hesitations, sources of support, and reactions of others (Tishelman & Fontes, 2016). In the instance of immigrant groups, these include 'legal and social complacency' regarding CSA in their countries of origin, which may reflect a fundamental cultural issue about the role of the state in a matter seen to belong to the domain of the family, commonly transferred after migration (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017).

ICSA and Institutional governance

Both the RCIRCSA and the Betrayal Inquiry highlighted the importance of institutional governance in regard to prevention and minimisation of ICSA (RCIRCSA, 2017c; Family and Pinskier, Mendes & Baidawi: An examination of the leadership and governance response of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders to institutional Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA)

Community Development Committee, 2013). Neither inquiry however, defined governance, nor key elements thereof within their glossaries (RCIRCSA, 2017a; Family and Community Development Committee, 2013). Though a uniform definition for governance is problematic to specify, it is generally recognised as the systems and processes that direct and control an organisational system, and the mechanisms by which it and its people are held to account (Governance Institute of Australia, 2022).

Previous research concerning ICSA within the Catholic Church and its related institutions has drawn attention to these links with institutional governance. For instance, literature acknowledging the crisis of ICSA within the Catholic church addressed the systemic nature of leadership and governance factors designed to protect the finances, reputation, power and authority of the institution, through extensive victim denials and legal manoeuvrings (Dokecki, 2004; Foley, 2019). The familial nature of clergy was also noted as responsible for the creation of the protective habit of 'movement' of perpetrators among the clergy, rather than reporting (Plante, 2004). Attendant reforms recommended that laity participate further in church governance, and specifically in dealing with the clergy sexual abuse system (Dokecki, 2004; Plante, 2004). Further, it was proposed that the Church operate with greater transparency, accountability and responsibility for policies and procedures to ensure that clergy not victimize children and undertake greater government and internal regulatory controls (Foley, 2019).

In the context of leadership particularly, it was recommended the church address moral and ethical leadership, rather than what might be expedient in the interests of the institution (Dokecki, 2004; Plante, 2004). Alignment with the culture of Judaism was noted here, with its strong inherent values implying '…compassion for the needy members of society [and] communal concern for truth and justice' (Friedman, et al., 2016, p. 51), and a synergy with the ethical and servant leadership models (Ben-Hur & Jonson, 2012). These models focus on morality, justice and caring values, aiming to ensure the benefit of those least privileged, followers and society (Ben-Hur & Jonson, 2012; Kalshoven, et al., 2011). Servant leadership is distinctive in serving individuals, as opposed to organisations (Spears, 2010; Greenleaf, 2002).

Leadership commonly emerges as an influential power-relationship in which the leader inspires, influences or guides followers, to promote movement or change (Northouse, 2018). More specific to communal organisations, leadership may be described as emerging through a plurality of individuals, rather than a power elite, acting together with common concerns, and commitment to well-being in a locality (Israel, et al., 2018).

Peak bodies (or roof bodies) in Australia act as representative organisations, incorporating membership of communal organisations, with a shared purpose or allied interests (Quixley, 2006), whose leadership would encourage membership to improve community wellbeing (Brookes, 2010).   In this instance, membership of a Jewish peak body would include diverse Jewish communal organisations within that state, such as schools, sporting clubs, synagogues, welfare and further groups.

Despite the broad acknowledgement that child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture (RCIRCSA, 2017c), no research to date has investigated the leadership and governance responses of Australian Jewish community peak bodies to ICSA. This critical knowledge gap has hindered the creation of a framework for Jewish community leadership governance reforms that may enable more effective strategies for preventing ICSA and advancing survivor support. This paper examines these issues from the perspective of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders. It will be followed by a second paper, relating these findings to comparative data sourced from survivors of ICSA within the Australian Jewish community.

Analysis of ICSA among the Australian Jewish community

To date, public analysis of Jewish community responses to manifestations of ICSA has mostly focused on ICSA in ultra-orthodox (also known as Haredi) communities, particularly drawing from evidence sourced out of Israel and the United States (Brown, 2017; Dolev-Cohen, et al., 2020; Featherman, 1995; Hamo & Idisis, 2017). Conversely, there has been limited research into ICSA and communal responses across the diverse religious spectrum of Jewish life (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017; Pinskier, et al., 2021).

The Haredi community, however, comprises only some 4% of the wider Australian Jewish community, that is, an estimated maximum of 4,200 of approximately 87,600 Jewish adults in Australia (Graham & Markus, 2018). An alternate estimate (Staetsky, 2022) suggests the total Haredi community as 6%, or approximately 7,500 of a Jewish population of 118,000 in Australia. Comparatively, as of 2020, the global Haredi community is estimated at approx. 2,100,000, or 14% of the total Jewish population of 15,000,000, with the majority of Haredi Jews living in Israel and the USA. In Israel, the country with the largest Haredi population, numbers are estimated at 1,200,000, or about 17% of the Jewish population. In the USA the community is estimated at about 700,000, or about 12% of the Jewish population (Staetsky, 2022).

Commonly categorised by religious practices, Jews are not solely a religious group but frequently identified as an ethnicity (Zuckerman, 2003). There is no 'typical Australian Jew' (Graham & Markus, 2018, p. 4), and Jewish communities globally are diverse in culture, class, concerns and habits, facilitating sundry religious practices and lifestyles (Featherman, 1995). Thus, it is vital when considering the Jewish community's response to ICSA, that the experiences of the wider (and much larger) Jewish cohort additional to the Haredi be recognised. A broad spectrum of characteristics found within the diverse Jewish community are identified in **Table 1**, below.

Table 1: Practices of disparate faith Jewish sub-groups (Markus, 2011)

Religious identification	Lifestyle practices
Ultra-orthodox (Haredi)	Preservation of traditional, religious values and practices.
Modern orthodox	Traditional teachings and practices; engaged with the modern world.
Traditional	Traditional values are upheld, to uphold Jewish life.
Conservative	More open to change than Orthodoxy, but more connected to tradition than other liberal forms of Judaism.
Progressive	Most progressive of religious streams, observing Jewish laws and practices through a liberal lens, maintaining that Judaism should be modernized and compatible with surrounding culture.

Secular	Focused on secular/cultural Judaism, rather than the spiritual; regarding Judaism as an evolving, cultural, civilisation.

The background to and impact of the RCIRCSA

Victims and survivors of ICSA and their supporters, had advocated consistently for government action in Australia, following many years of allegations of CSA in institutional contexts across the country, and the reluctance of institutions involved to address the issue. In response, the RCIRCSA was established by the Federal Government in 2013 (RCIRCSA, 2013; RCIRCSA, 2017c).

The RCIRCSA (2013-2017) (RCIRCSA, 2013) recommended a number of Child Safety Standards (CSS) to protect children and young people from abuse within institutions. The first of these stated: 'Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture' (CSS1) (RCIRCSA, 2017c, p. 109). As part of their work the RCIRCSA reviewed institutions across Australia.

Detailed and nuanced research on specific Jewish community organisations identified as of concern was undertaken by the RCIRCSA. However, the Commission limited its investigation to two Haredi communities and their associated institutions, Yeshiva Bondi (Sydney), and Yeshivah Melbourne (not connected) (RCIRCSA, 2016). The RCIRCSA also addressed matters regarding governance and leadership to promote institutional child safety at length in their findings and recommendations. While focusing on the Haredi communities, these findings did to some smaller degree highlight implications for the wider Jewish community.

RCIRCSA reports noted that certain types of institutional cultures (as detailed pertinent to the RCIRCSA review of the Haredi communities) (2016), created heightened risks for ICSA (RCIRCSA, 2017d). In addressing the range of diverse institutions examined across Australia, the Commission observed that more allegations were received of CSA in relation to institutions managed by a range of religious organisations than any other management type. Typical of this was the Catholic church, with over 60% of the survivors who participated in over 8000 private sessions with the Commission, relating their experiences of abuse in a Catholic church institution (RCIRCSA, 2017e). The RCIRCSA found numerous cases where senior officials of Church authorities knew about allegations of abuse well prior to the final two decades of the 20th century, yet failed to take effective action, with findings indicating that the avoidance of

public scandal, maintenance of the Church and loyalty to priests and religious largely determined its responses (Foley, 2019).

Extensive recommendations emerged from the RCIRCSA regarding practices in religious institutions that targeted governance, internal culture and underlying religious beliefs and practices, and the importance of their alignment with the proposed Child Safety Standards (RCIRCSA, 2017d). For example, they included:

Catholic Church

- **Recommendation 16.7** 'The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference should conduct a national review of the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women…' (RCIRCSA, 2017d, p. 73)

Recommendations to all religious institutions in Australia

- **Recommendation 16.36** 'Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution in Australia should ensure that its religious leaders are provided with leadership training both pre- and post-appointment, including in relation to the promotion of child safety' (RCIRCSA, 2017d, p. 78)

- **Recommendation 16.38** 'Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should ensure that religious leaders are accountable to an appropriate authority or body, such as a board of management or council, for the decisions they make with respect to child safety' (RCIRCSA, 2017d, p. 79).

- **Recommendation 16.39** 'Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should have a policy relating to the management of actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse. The policy should cover all individuals who have a role in responding to complaints of child sexual abuse' (RCIRCSA, 2017d, p. 79)

The RCIRCSA added that risk factors can be influenced by the community in which the institution operates, for example by community attitudes (RCIRCSA, 2017g). In regard to assisting survivors of ICSA, RCIRCSA recommendations included offering, at the survivor

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request, re-engagement, direct apology, meetings with senior representatives of the institution, and assurance that the institution had taken, or would take, steps to prevent further abuse of children (RCIRCSA, 2017f).

Given that the specific RCIRCA recommendations regarding Jewish communities focused on the Haredi, the question remains as to the performance of the lay leadership of the wider Jewish community of Australia in responding to ICSA and providing survivor support. Hence, the **research question** of this study is:

What do the responses of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders tell us about their leadership and governance, in regard to institutional child sexual abuse?

Governance

Leaders have a series of legal roles and duties addressing their obligation to govern and act in the best interests of their organisation, and the processes by which they do so (Moores, 2020). Fundamental elements include:

- Accountability: Ensuring the governing body is answerable for decisions and fulfillment of responsibilities. Stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in what the organisation does, should be able to hold leaders to account (Cornforth, 2001), and must be provided with adequate means to raise concerns (Holland, 2002; Pomeranz & Stedman, 2020).
- Transparency: Providing adequate information to those affected by decisions (Pomeranz & Stedman, 2020).
- Conflicts of interest: The governing body works to an established code to ensure duties to the organisation/members are prioritised, above actual or potential personal interests (Ryan, 2019)
- Compliance: Decisions meet legal and regulatory obligations and internal policies (Byrne, 2025).
- Organisational culture: Leaders establish, monitor and evaluate norms and values, to ensure an ethical organisation. Values are clear, periodically reviewed and communicated to stakeholders (Ryan, 2019; MacCormick, 2019).
- Stakeholder engagement *(Victims / Survivors in this instance)*: Stakeholders are people involved in an organisation. A process for meaningful engagement exists, including a

framework for protection of vulnerable people, for gathering and responding to complaints and feedback (Ryan, 2019).

Methods

This section outlines the methodological approach to addressing the research question above.

Reflexivity statement

The background and life, (of Author One), was deeply ensconced in the practices and community of mainstream, traditional Judaism in Melbourne, Australia. This included education at the local Haredi, Chabad girls' school, followed by qualifications in Education, Jewish Communal Service and Leadership, Governance and Mediation. With a strong belief in service to the community, an extensive history on communal boards ensued, including in Jewish welfare, arts and education, as well as government appointments in the multi-cultural sector. During this time, consultation services in governance to not-for-profit boards, was also part of the author's professional life,   consistently guided by innate values of integrity, ethical leadership and practice. Ultimately, the impetus for this study grew from attendance at RCIRCSA reviews of the Jewish community, to support Jewish community survivors of ICSA, who were providing testimony regarding their traumatic experiences. This attendance, as it turned out, was in the absence of all communal leaders, and any anticipated support their presence would bring. This absence was noted by many, when nothing seemed more important than to provide acknowledgement for the voices of the ICSA victims in our own community. It is evident from these words that the researcher positionality is that of an 'Insider'; a member of the community and culture under study and familiar with many of the leaders, survivors and secondary victims who form key voices within the research data. It is not suggested that the author has stepped away from her values or culture, rather that with self-awareness, they bring much of what is most insightful to the study.

Sample

A purposive sampling approach (Carey, 2012) was utilised to identify the most suitable study participants. Qualifying characteristics included Australian Jewish community peak body governance and operational leaders who had held leadership roles such as Presidents, Directors and Committee leaders or CEOs within Jewish peak body organisations in Australia, through

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the period of study (2012-2024). In addition, these individuals provided either testimony or submission to one or both of the Betrayal Inquiry, or the RCIRCSA (Case Studies 22, 53 or both).

Participants were identified through Betrayal Inquiry and RCIRCSA reports, available through the inquiry websites, along with peak body organisational websites. Attendance at the RCIRCSA reviews and familiarity with leadership and communal networks enabled further confirmation of suitable participants.

Recruitment

Seven individuals were recruited to participate in the study, with a gender mix of four males to three females. Individuals were invited to participate through email contacts held or located in the public domain, (e.g. LinkedIn, peak body contact lists). All participants received an Introductory cover letter, an Explanatory statement[1], and a Consent form, for completion prior to participation in the study. No reimbursement was offered for participation in the study.

Data collection

The study context (locations across Australia) will be kept confidential to minimise the risk of participant identification.

Between January 2022 and September 2024, individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This approach was deemed advantageous due to its flexible nature, the option to source additional responses or observations, and the opportunity to receive unanticipated feedback from the interviewee (Guest, et al., 2017). Data were collected around several key open-ended questions, interrogating leadership and governance concepts, designed to inform peak body responses to ICSA. These included:

- What do you consider were the strengths and / or limitations of your organisation's response to ICSA?
- How do you consider culture (Jewish and mainstream) impacted leadership practices?
- With hindsight, what could your organisation have done differently to drive improved child safety standards in the Australian Jewish community?
- Has there been change over the period of study? If so, what do you consider were the triggers? How was change driven?

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[1] Explanatory Statement may be requested

- Reflections on organisational changes in relation to ICSA over the past decade?

Participants were offered the opportunity to present views regarding the performance of their own organisations, as well as other organisations within the Australian Jewish community, with which they had interactions or observations, during the period of the study (2012-2024). Thus, responses addressed both past and relatively contemporary observations and experiences.

Interviews took place at the participant's preferred location, (e.g. home, work or an alternate location). Most interviews lasted between 1.5-2 hours; with one of shorter length lasting one hour and were audio-recorded with two means of technology. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Ethics

The study was approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Prior to research an appraisal of possible risk or discomfort to participants was undertaken and assessed as low. Invited participants were advised of associated risks, and exclusion criteria (requesting self-exclusion for survivors of CSA/ICSA). Information regarding support services were included within the Explanatory statement. Participants were also advised that they were able to withdraw from the research at any time or withdraw their data prior to publication without penalty. Upon completion of primary research, no interviewees have expressed any concerns post-interview, nor have there been any requests for data withdrawal.

Informed consent and confidentiality

Mindful of the relatively small and tightly knit nature of the Australian Jewish community, involvement with both the RCIRCSA and Betrayal of Trust Inquiries, as well as the sensitive subject matter of the research, matters of privacy have been considered particularly important in the instance of this study. Acronyms were assigned to all participants immediately upon assent to participate in the research and henceforth utilised on transcriptions and within research journal notebooks. All data was contained within a password protected computer; and any hard copy data produced (e.g. printed) was contained in a locked file, with limited access. In addition, publications issued as a result of the study all received secondary evaluation by colleagues to ensure that identity of the participants was protected.

Coding and analysis

A deductive process was utilised to establish a series of pre-defined codes that responded to the research question. These were based largely on governance frameworks and included terms such as leadership, organisational strengths, organisational weaknesses, accountability, conflicts of interest and stakeholder (survivor) engagement. It was considered that in addressing ICSA, practice as demonstrated within these codes, would illuminate the quality of governance and leadership manifested by organisational leadership.

Data within each code was then analysed thematically, using the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). As data was analysed, further sub-codes were generated and identified, such as governance elements in regard to allegations of institutional complaints and management and institutional and communal prioritisation of reputation.

Analysis of early interviews progressed concurrently with later interviews. Consistent with the exploratory approach, on occasion, questions within these later interviews may have been changed or modified as topics of interest emerged during early stages of analysis (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). An example of such modification was the thematic emergence, in an inductive fashion, of peak leadership responsibilities in their relationships with Jewish institutions or organisations in the community that were not affiliated with the peak bodies. In these situations, the question of degree of responsibility, or manner of influence, if any, in seeking to address ICSA behaviours and survivor support, arose.

Utilising thematic analysis, codes were ultimately fine-tuned and themes emerged, from which findings were developed.

Rigour

Internal checking was utilized during this study to augment credibility and validity. The interviewer undertook interview transcription and developed initial themes and codes from the data. All transcripts were reviewed by colleagues, who further reviewed the analysis and findings.

Findings

Findings have been reported in broad sections that align with the deductive codes introduced earlier. These codes reflected the topics of interest in the research question which sought to

determine the responses of Australian Jewish community peak leaders in relation to their leadership and governance regarding ICSA.

Leadership

The values and standards of leadership behaviour as defined above (see Key Terms) were used in this study to examine the responses of Australian Jewish community peak leaders regarding ICSA. Thematically, data provided extensive feedback on alignment with the ethical, servant and Jewish culture models that detailed foci on morality, caring values and justice as practised in leadership in the Australian Jewish community and responses to ICSA. All participants provided response on this theme, with multiple remarks being provided suggesting lack of attention, comprehension or care in these matters.

'They're about…[behaviour] immoral and insensitive…' [PQR1]

'…[the leaders] don't really understand the importance of justice for victims….' [PQR1]

Notwithstanding, it was noted that data also provided examples of moral, above legal obligations in choices and practices of leadership in difficult situations:

'…people on the board …accepted… if not a legal obligation, a moral obligation…' [STU1]

Not all participants however, agreed with these patterns of behaviour:

'…obviously, looking at leadership, it was putting things under the carpet rather than dealing with them.' [MNO1]

Multiple remarks were also made on the emergent code of reputational prioritisation above survivor care and support, as it applied to both institutions and the Australian Jewish community. These remarks were offered by leaders reflecting on practices of both their own, and other peak bodies within the community, consistently reflecting on poor leadership ethics:

'…one of the big failures, ..was the need to protect the reputation of the organisation at all costs…that meant sacrificing the individual for the greater cause…' [JKL1]

Further to leadership and change, it was widely recognised that change in acknowledgement of ICSA in the Australian Jewish community had occurred over the period of the study. A strongly consensual theme emerged, with almost all participants emphatically accrediting survivors survivors/survivor advocates as being those who "drove the change" [GHI1], rather than communal or peak body leadership:

'It's the survivors, the victims and the survivors, ...they are the real leaders, ... Even if they're anonymous,.. they're the ones who have spearheaded and brought about change...' [JKL1]

Six of the seven participants also mentioned government leadership through either the national RCIRCSA or the Victorian state Betrayal Inquiry, as responsible for change within the Jewish community, largely by promoting awareness.

'...government leadership at both state and,.. national level,.. there was a Royal Commission, ... all have drawn attention to what had happened in the past… you know, has made organisations accountable.' [STU1]

'…the Victorian Inquiry, that really made us think we need to do something because we're just the same as the rest of the world.' [MNO1]

Governance

Addressed as an overarching concept, evidence was identified of a reluctance to engage with the concept, or inadequate governance practices within multiple organisations and peak bodies across the community. This was suggested as due to lack of education or a desire to prioritize other agendas, (e.g. institutional / communal reputational prioritisation).

'…came to it [governance] almost kicking and screaming, you'd have to say.' [STU1]

'…the more hierarchical kinds of organisations probably struggled more, dealing with governance and managing conflicts and that sort of thing, than others' [JKL1]

'I cannot see how that didn't affect the governance of a lot of the organisations, when everyone was just sort of looking after their own space and trying to protect their own.' [JKL1]

'Well, what general manager doesn't take notes at the most important meeting of the organisation at the centre of the storm, unless she was asked not to?' [GHI1]

Indeed, a small number of participants went so far as to question the purposefulness of peak bodies within the community, in light of poor governance practices. Concerns were voiced regarding inadequate service provision by peak bodies regarding ICSA within the community, survivor solidarity, and indeed their value to the community at large.

'…most of the [Jewish peak body leaders] didn't do anything, even though they all had portfolios' [GHI1]

'I've always wondered what the true value and benefit is of, say, the [Peak body B] as an oversight body, what do they actually do?' [STU1]

Elements of governance

It was noted in data emerging, the repeated expressions of well-recognised elements of governance. These included terms such as accountability, conflicts of interests, organisational culture and stakeholder engagement (victim/survivor in this instance) (Pinskier, et al., 2021), thereby drawing out these principal concepts aligned with the research outcomes.

Accountability   Findings noted an appearance of accountability breakdowns, with poor answerability to constituencies, and repeated distress regarding constituent means to achieve satisfactory, or even adequate responses to identified concerns. While only three participants responded on the issue of accountability, this was most evident in data received regarding a range of Jewish community leaders and their perceived actions, or omissions, in the context of ICSA and survivor support. Accountability failings also noted long-standing failures to acknowledge and respond to ICSA in the community, despite repeated requests by survivors and advocates on these matters. This included resistance to survivors in dealing with alleged perpetrators, public denial of incidents, condemnation of survivors, and failures to participate or assist in resolving matters of individual or institutional ICSA in the community. Feedback in regard to leadership accountability was one of the areas where greatest data was received, with extensive input describing poor practices, going back prior to the days of the RCIRCSA. A small number of participants reflected that failures in accountability in regard to elements of ICSA were ongoing to this day.

'…five Jewish community leaders who have never been held to account for their part in what happened in the context of child sexual abuse,..' [PQR1]

'There has still been lack of accountability … that needs to be addressed or at the very least not ignored.' [PQR1]

'…if you have expectations or requirements, then you need to make your members accountable for those.' [STU1]

Transparency   While there was considerable feedback on the subject of accountability, minimal appreciation of transparency seemed apparent. Remarks were received from three participants only, with mixed observations. One leader expressed profound appreciation of an early, internal Redress Scheme designed and managed by another Jewish body, in response to

allegations of historical ICSA. It involved wide community transparency in practice, through broad media and communal advertising of processes; and for those bringing complaints, through practices undertaken within the scheme.

'It was swift, it was transparent and it was effective.' [ABC1] '

Alternatively, it was remarked how peak body leadership was seen to minimize transparency, in internal decision making to protect an employee, rather than support survivors.

'…as a leader in the Jewish community, [they protected an employee], rather than protect the victims and survivors, and rather than to bring accountability, rather than bring transparency,..' [PQR1]

Conflicts of interest (COI) – Data delivered responses regarding COI practices that adversely impacted on survivors, plus lack of COI policies, or limited quality and comprehension of practices, generally. Though only two participants commented on concerns, both of these provided extensive input suggesting considerable peak body limitations. Poor attention to COI was identified across numerous peak bodies, thus impacting widely upon survivors.

 '…the conflicts of interest, which is very typical in small communities, especially in the Jewish community. Talk about the [XXX] councils as well..., it's not only about the [Peak body A] and [Peak body B] and [Peak body C]' [PQR1]

Participants conceded unexceptional management of conflicts of interests within their own organisations, and on occasion, lack of confidence as to whether COI policies existed at all.

'I think that the *conflicts* were managed satisfactorily, not necessarily brilliantly, but at least at a base level.' [JKL1]

'I don't remember whether a specific code of *conflict* of interest was established.' [JKL1]

Organisational culture - The five participants who remarked upon organisational culture, provided a range of data on perceived shortcomings addressing ICSA within the community. These included cultural attention to institutional or communal reputational prioritisation above the issue of ICSA or survivor support as leadership norms or priorities, the culture of leadership choices in disparaging survivors or survivor groups, and the lack of organisational culture in attention to internal ICSA policies. Almost uniformly, these observations tended to be made about peak bodies other than the participant's own:

'[Peak body B] and ... [Peak body A]... need to help children because that's in our culture,...but [we] need to protect the reputation of the community....that took precedence over … protecting the interests of children.' [PQR1]

'… I didn't notice a lot of care in them [culture of leadership choices].' [GHI1]

'It wasn't just [Leader, Peak body A], it was the organisation [Peak body A], … a culture of what was going on… some of the discussions … there was very much [anti-xxx(survivor) and anti-survivor advocacy group] ….' [PQR1]

'…It's not just about having policies hidden in your hard drive somewhere or collecting dust on some shelf, it's about bringing the policies to life and creating an actual cultural awareness…' [JKL1]

Aligning with earlier research by Friedman et al. on Jewish cultural values (2016), was input received from one participant as to the importance of centring the culture of all Jewish organisations around helping the vulnerable, and those requiring safety and protection:

'…most foundational value that every … Jewish organisation should have…the voice of the child or of the vulnerable person… it's a real human being who deserves this absolute safety and protection as a fundamental and inalienable right…it's about centring the culture of the organisation around that simple fact,...' [JKL1]

Stakeholder (survivor) engagement In this instance particular to victim or survivor support, stakeholder engagement would have anticipated long-term organisational 'in-house' support and engagement with these individuals, cross-communal interaction to provide personal support, and public acknowledgement and activity to drive improved outcomes in organisations where allegations had occurred. It was widely acknowledged that general engagement and support of victims was not undertaken by peak body leaders.

All participants addressed this element, with one providing general remarks only. Of the remaining six participants, comments overwhelmingly suggested indifference to survivor interests, acknowledging not being "tasked to find out" [DEF1], and lack of engagement and support in the past and on to contemporary times, when interviews were undertaken:

'…they definitely had other priorities than… looking after the interests of survivors and of kids today.' [PQR1]

' …[Peak body A] lack of doing anything when this was clearly a national issue as well as a state issue was not helping, and the lack of support for [XXX-survivor advocate] as the major mouthpiece of the victims in those days was a major problem as well.' [GHI1]

'…I don't think that child protection has been high [approx. 2020 to present]… on the public policy agenda of the big bodies.' [DEF1]

Data went so far as to comment upon actively negative actions toward survivors:

'[Leader, Peak body A],… did quite a few things, but the most outrageous thing that he did, that really set the tone for the attacks against victims and survivors'   [PQR1]

'...not only to have had, [the survivors] at the least, a mutual response, but to have an adversarial response,... is a tragedy…' [JKL1]

Data was received regarding inadequate stakeholder engagement, or take consequent action, due to failure to "know what's happening" [MNO1]:

 '…we didn't know how to, or what was needed' [ABC1]

A number of participants however, acknowledged past failings in choices made, reflecting on the importance of reaching out to victims, survivors and advocates:

'I should definitely have been more supportive of [survivor advocate]....No question about that.' [ABC1]

Notwithstanding the remarks above, there were a range of observations received addressing peak body activity undertaken in consideration of survivor needs:

'… expressing to the community about the importance of support for *survivors*. It was... one of the first statements they [Peak body B] put out.' [GHI1]

Finally, there were a number of responses reflecting lack of awareness as to how leadership engaged with survivors since the RCIRCSA, whether survivors felt better supported, or what they currently sought from the community:

'I couldn't tell you, I don't know' [STU1]

Discussion

This paper is the first to address the responses of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders in regard to their leadership and governance regarding ICSA, through interviews with

seven leaders of peak Jewish bodies across the states of Australia. Building on the existing literature, particularly the recommendations of the RCIRCSA, findings have further emphasised the importance placed by Child Safety Standards upon effective institutional leadership, governance and organisational culture, to underline establishment of positive outcomes to ensure child safety and survivor support.

Australian Jewish community peak leadership responses identified a range of themes aligned with the concepts mentioned in Child Safety Standard One. The examples of deficiencies in practice they highlighted on multiple occasions included poor leadership engagement with the concept of ICSA and associated role and responsibilities, and a failure to advance survivor support within the Australian Jewish community.

Leadership

Key themes to emerge in addressing Leadership, included a lack of awareness or comprehension to the crisis of ICSA within the community, or consideration of the application of Jewish cultural values noted by Friedman et al. (compassion and justice for those in need) (2016), in their actions. There seemed to be an absence of interest to the importance or necessity of goals designed to promote the greater good, or support for those in need. Little facilitation was directed toward advancing action by peak body member affiliates or the wider Jewish community, to turn their efforts towards prioritization of minimizing risk of ICSA in the community, or to highlighting the importance of, and seeing to the provision of survivor support.

The issue of reputational prioritisation above acknowledgement of ICSA incidents or survivor support, whether institutional or communal, emerged as an ongoing theme, first under the banner of leadership, and again, repeatedly within a range of elements attached to governance practice. Earlier literature addressing the issue of reputational prioritisation in general by the RCIRCSA (Palmer, et al., 2016; RCIRCSA, 2017c), as well as the Catholic Church (Foley, 2019), has noted the existence of this problematic practice. Literature reports the damage it causes, including in prevention of disclosures and the impact on poor choices by leadership when confronted with allegations, and speaks to the importance that these practices be addressed by leadership (RCIRCSA, 2017c).

Survivors and survivor advocates were emphatically recognised as responsible for acknowledgement of ICSA and associated changes in the Australian Jewish community, rather

than peak body leaders. This indicated a deficit of leadership in the latter's role of guiding change designed to protect against further abuse of children and aspects of survivor abuse.

Governance and governance elements

The study suggested poor overarching governance in a range of areas. Key themes emerged with a synergy on the impact poor practices had on those bringing allegations of abuse, and overwhelmingly, poor survivor support. Accountability breakdowns revealed failures to acknowledge to respond to ICSA in the community, and inadequate responses to identified concerns. This included the clear voice that emerged as to actions by leaders themselves being accountable for survivor injustices. Indeed, despite a range of private requests and media presence, it was not till the period of the RCIRCSA that Australian Jewish peak body leaders publicly apologized for the pain of the survivors, and their own past failures. Despite such public apologies, feedback regarding leadership failures in accountability to elements of ICSA were identified as ongoing to this day. Concerns were evident in areas pertaining to policy and practice mismanagement, most particularly regarding Conflicts of Interest (COI). It was noted that leadership commonly prioritized alternate personal, institutional and communal interests, above matters regarding ICSA and internal organisational allegations of abuse, or survivor support. Where leaders believed COI management were something of which leadership were cognisant, they readily acknowledged that undertakings were far from best practice. The RCIRCSA had highlighted damage caused by leadership actions involving poor COI practices across numerous institutions, including the Jewish institutions reviewed (2017c).

Stakeholder engagement, as mentioned previously, produced a recognisable perception to poor practice among peak body leaders during the period of the study, which speaks to the consequent adverse survivor experience within the Australian Jewish community. Themes pertaining to survivor engagement revealed a disinterest in survivors, and a lack of survivor support or care for survivor needs. Data went so far as to remark that leadership was unaware as to whether survivors felt better supported, or what they might require from the community and it's leadership in contemporary times.

Outcomes suggest there is room for improvement in regard to leadership and governance education and practices regarding ICSA, along with survivor support in the community. Notwithstanding, the study has provided some general remarks and positive observations to principal codes and emerging themes, on leadership and governance practices. These suggest, perhaps above all, improved contemporary public acknowledgement of ICSA within the

community, as well as improved accountability in recognition of a range of past leadership failings, most particularly regarding inadequate survivor support. In addition, the importance of greater contemporary, communal support for survivors has been noted.

Implications for policy and practice

Earlier literature, along with research findings of this study, indicate that the following recommendations would be of benefit to leadership/leadership groups of additional faith / ethnic / community agencies working with children at risk of ICSA and survivors.

Research outcomes have suggested that peak body leadership with the Jewish community of Australia, has been deficient in prioritisation regarding ICSA. In practice, this has included application of values key to Jewish principles (compassion and justice for those most needy), actions to promote communal awareness, child safety and provision of survivor support. Actions to address these matters, would therefore be considered of importance.

To this end, we therefore recommend:

- A process to expand regular education of Jewish leadership regarding ICSA identification, impacts, and how best to support survivors. Such educational processes should be heavily informed by the lived experience of ICSA survivors.

- Peak body leadership development of ongoing internal committees including individuals with lived experience, to report to, support and advise leadership regarding matters of concern/further as seen fit, as may arise within the community.

A further implication that has emerged from the study is the need to reform governance practices within Australian Jewish peak bodies to provide enhanced recognition of the risk of ICSA within the community along with greater survivor support. It is therefore recommended that all Australian, Jewish peak bodies maintain:

Governance committees; chaired by a board member/external individual with formal governance training (e.g. AICD Company Directors Course [TM]) (AICD, 2025). Role to include:
- Induction: To be undertaken by all incoming directors of peak bodies, within three months, to include leadership, governance and child safety:
  - o Familiarisation with organisation constitutions and policies, including child safety policies

- o Hold meeting to review the above, their interpretation, and capacity of peak bodies to mitigate risk of ICSA and promote survivor support across the community
- Manage regular professional development sessions on board meeting agendas dealing with governance and leadership, and their synergy with ICSA and survivor support in community.

Future research

- Following analysis of the responses of Australian Jewish community peak body leaders regarding their leadership and governance in regard to ICSA, this study suggests that further research, analysing the views of ICSA survivors within the Australian Jewish community in response to this question, would be of value.

- Further, it would be beneficial to research the processes and timelines in place by which peak body organisations (and other major groups within the Jewish community) ensured their board members:
  - o Were familiar with their; organisation constitutions, in particular purposes and powers and their capacity to address child safety and survivor support across the community, and organisation policies, in particular regarding child safety and survivor support;
  - o Were educated or received professional development regarding ICSA and; the synergy with their governance responsibilities, and RCIRCSA recommendations relevant to their leadership and governance obligations and practices.

Limitations

The Australian national Jewish peak leadership body, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, elected not to take part in direct consultations for this research. While such consultations would have been of value, relevant data concerning their actions was sourced from the public record, and claims supported through data provided by other participants.

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Ethics

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