

# Hush money? How compensation can leave child abuse survivors with mixed feelings

August 17 2020, by Samina Karim

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Earlier this year the ruling body for the Church of England voted in favour of compensating survivors who had been sexually abused by members of the clergy. This means the church could be [forced to pay](#)

[out](#) £200 million as "redress" to thousands of victims.

This is just one of a number of high-profile cases making payouts for historic abuse [over recent years](#). In the majority of cases, this money—usually referred to as financial redress—comes from the government. Sometimes, churches or voluntary organisations, for example, may be required to contribute to the payout if the abuse occurred at homes run or overseen by them.

But as my [recent research](#) highlights, victims and survivors often tend to have mixed views about the idea of [financial compensation](#).

## **Recognition of suffering**

My study involved in-depth interviews with victims and survivors of historic abuse in Scotland. The people I interviewed saw both the potential benefits but also the harm that monetary payments could lead to.

Overwhelmingly, victims and survivors felt that compensation was a right. It was viewed as a way of appropriately supporting people adversely affected throughout the course of their lives as a result of the abuse that they had experienced. As well as being a way of offering practical support, financial compensation was also seen as an acknowledgement of what these people had suffered.

Some of the people I spoke with were quite clear that, rather than injecting large financial sums [into other processes](#) such as inquiries, money should go directly to the victims and survivors so that they may practically benefit.

But despite these perceived benefits, many were concerned as to what the meaning of the [payment](#) would actually be for them. This was

particularly the case among a number of people who had experienced sexual abuse. Some saw payments as holding very negative connotations.

One person I spoke with told me how they felt that compensation was the government's way of saying: "as a child you were a good prostitute and ... this is the payment, albeit 40 years delayed. Now can you please go away and not bother us anymore."

Some people I spoke to also considered payments to be a form of "shut-up money" and questioned whether it was appropriate to place a value or a price on someone's abuse. Others worried that giving large sums of money to victims and survivors could lead to more harm than good, particularly when some remained vulnerable with drug and alcohol dependencies.

## **Impact of compensation**

These mixed views on compensation expressed by victims and survivors are mirrored by research carried out [in other countries](#). Such findings suggest that while financial compensation should be offered, there needs to be more of an understanding of the impact of such payments.

Although these compensation schemes cannot necessarily cater to the specific needs of everyone, it's still really important for victims and survivors to know from the outset that accessing compensation could be a complex experience. This is why the government and people who work with victims and survivors of [abuse](#) need to be clear about the potential for negative outcomes.

At the very least, victims and survivors should know that receiving [compensation](#) may not offer them closure. And that they may be left with further upset and in need of extra support.

This is important given victims and survivors have already experienced a [lack of power and control](#) - so it's only right that any response takes into account how the workings of power may further impact those who suffered while in care.

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