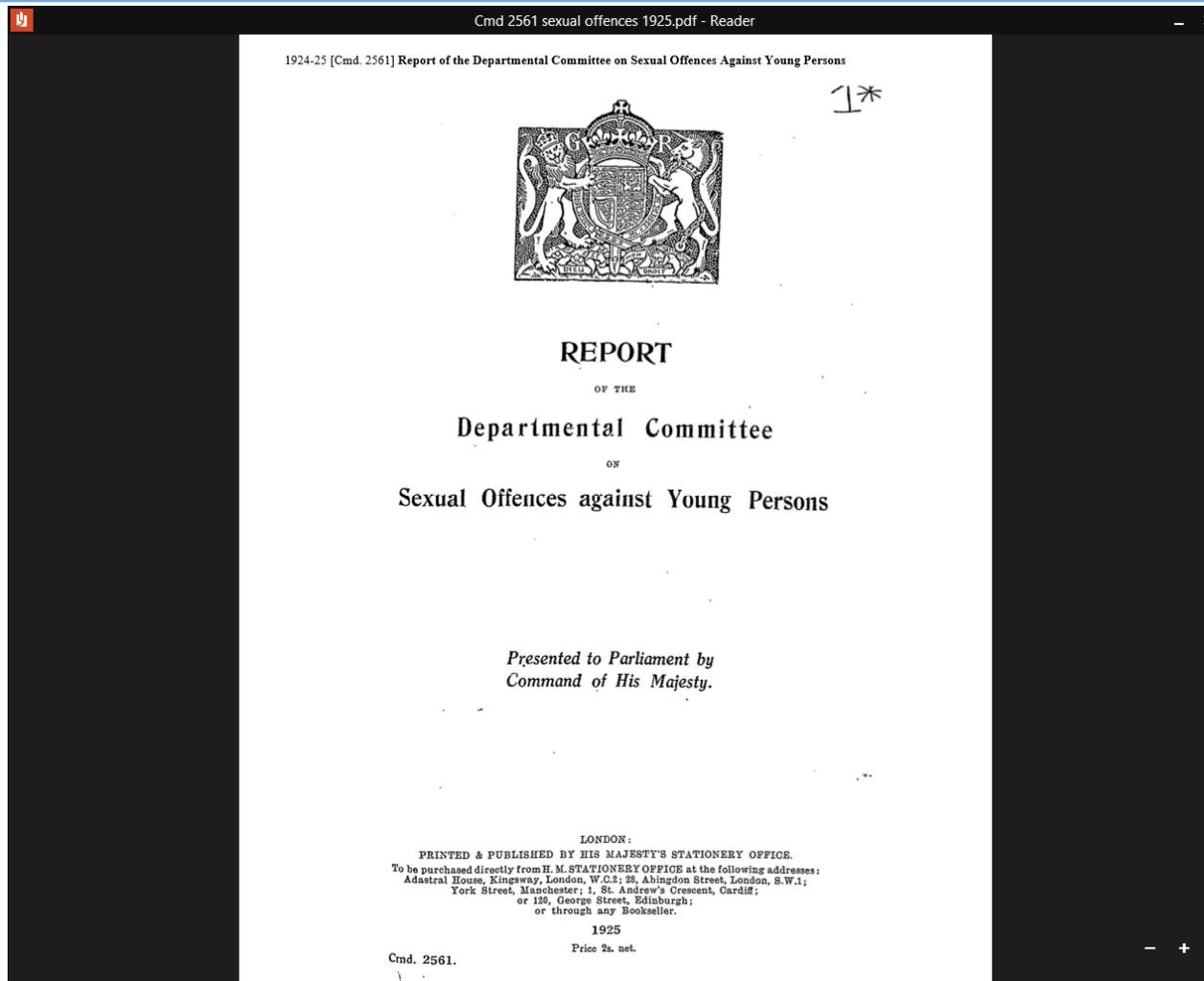


# Disclosures of child sexual abuse: historical perspectives

Dr Lucy Delap

Faculty of History, University of Cambridge

# 1925 Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences against Young Persons



# Non-disclosure amongst child and young adult survivors of child sexual abuse

- ‘I did not know how to express myself about the matter of his unnatural behaviour.’
- ‘I thought I was naughty and I deserved everything I got because that's how indoctrinated and molested children are taught, [...] that's what my grandfather and my uncle told me, that you should keep things to yourself, don't go telling Mum and Dad.’
- ‘My mum was very cold, and she had been molested too - you see? [...] Nothing was said.’

# Indirect disclosure

‘I knew it was wrong but there was no-one to tell and I was always afraid of getting other people into trouble. I suspect too, that it was a comfort to think somewhat misguidedly, that someone liked me when no one else seemed to.’

# Disbelief

- ‘such accusations are an occupational hazard... all rescue workers are accused of immorality, male or female, by the girls if there is a loophole.’ M L Shaw, 1918
- ‘the most elaborate and circumstantial accusations are sometimes made without any basis in fact.’ 1963, *Child Victims of Sex Offenders*
- ‘Many little girls know a great deal about sex behaviour from observation from an early age, and it holds no great surprises. They may not participate emotionally in offences, but they certainly precipitate them; and, if supported by another child of the same age, will blackmail adults to pay them weekly for the repetition of the same indecent act.’ Ibid. 1963

## Disclosures of abuse by male survivors

- ‘When I was fourteen, [...] I first became conscious of my lowly status in society. And being a highly sensitive lad, I was never to forget the incident (which I will not describe here) which occurred that afternoon [at a cricket match].’ *Edward Balne*
- ‘The systematic ill-usage of helpless, depressed, and under-fed children enacted within the four walls of that unsavoury little lavatory, the volume of juvenile misery and fear that went daily in and out at that dingy little portal, render it sinister in my recollection to the last degree, and fix it for ever in my thoughts in the abhorrent category of torture-chamber and dungeon-cell and all kindred hell-holes of cowardly oppression and inhumanity.’ *Frank Steel*

# Aftermath of abuse

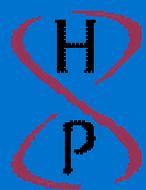
- '[It] was an experience from which I have never fully recovered. It affected my nerves and my whole outlook upon life. It affected my confidence and personality and it left a feeling of a deep and profound inferiority complex which generally has overshadowed everything I have tried to accomplish over the years.' *Edward Balne*
- 'As I look back over my life, what do I see down all the vista of the years but long drab stretches of discouragement and disappointment; of hopeless, or but half-hopeful because always cramped and hindered endeavour; of heart-breaking hope deferred; of painful groping in the dim and tangled ways of sordidness and deprivation. [...] Just as one was thinking: "Here comes the sun at last!" - the cheering rift closed in and all was overcast again.' *Frank Steel*

# Belief and containment

- ‘Auntie Peggy used to say to me that maybe I had imagined it and it was wrong for her Dad to get in trouble with her mum over it... I blamed myself for a long time...’ *Mrs Mayhew*
- ‘...I was imagining it, I told her my brother was touching me in places and he was loving me. She said she couldn't comment on what he was doing.’
- ‘I’m sorry but if you knew a ten-year-old was sleeping in the same bed as a fourteen- year-old you would say there was something amiss.’ (interview in 2010)

## Emma Smith, *A Cornish Waif's Story*, 1954

- ‘...One evening I found myself alone with Mr Pratt. For a while he sat looking at me in an evil way that made me afraid. At last he said, ‘Come here, Emma.’ I obeyed, slowly. This beast – old enough to be my grandfather – grabbed hold of me, a child about six years of age, if I was that. He undid some of my clothing and behaved in a disgusting way. Presently he said ‘Don’t tell Ma or Charlie what I’ve done, or something awful will happen.’
- ‘I live in dread that one day I shall appear in a film without warning.’
- ‘My little book was meant to do good in a quiet way – but the different shocks I have had from the time it first appeared have almost made me feel suicidal ... This is my own intimate story being blazed abroad... Rowse is now able to exploit me for gain just as surely as ever [my abuser] exploited me as a child.’



# HISTORY & POLICY

Connecting historians, policymakers and the media

More details of our work on historic child sexual abuse, including briefing papers, can be found at History & Policy

<http://www.historyandpolicy.org>

Research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council