# Organised Abuse FAQ2

## 1. What is organised abuse?

Organised abuse refers to abuse involving multiple perpetrators who act together within some form of established structure, network or coordinated arrangement. It may involve planning, shared activities, the allocation of roles and repeated or ongoing exploitation.

Organised abuse can involve physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse, as well as trafficking, financial exploitation, intimidation and coercive control.

The degree of organisation varies. Some cases involve clearly identifiable structures, while others involve informal networks of individuals.

## 2. How does organised abuse differ from group-based abuse?

Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they describe different aspects of abusive behaviour.

- Group-based abuse refers to abuse involving two or more perpetrators. It does not necessarily require planning, formal organisation or an established hierarchy.
- Organised abuse generally refers to abuse involving a degree of coordination, structure, planning or established relationships between perpetrators.

For example, several individuals participating in an abusive incident would constitute group-based abuse. An established network coordinating recruitment, exploitation, intimidation or concealment may be more accurately described as organised abuse.

Not all group-based abuse is organised, although organised abuse is generally group-based.

## 3. Does organised abuse require a formal hierarchy?

No. Organised abuse does not necessarily involve a formal hierarchy, leadership structure or clearly defined chain of command.

Some networks may have identifiable leaders and subordinate participants, while others operate through informal relationships, shared interests or overlapping responsibilities.

## 4. What forms can organised abuse take?

Organised abuse can occur in a variety of settings and may include:

- Organised child sexual exploitation.
- Human trafficking and exploitation.
- Organised sexual abuse.
- Family-based networks involving multiple perpetrators.
- Institutional abuse.
- Exploitation within high-control groups.

- Organised criminal exploitation.
- Coordinated psychological abuse and intimidation.
- Forced labour and servitude.
- Financial exploitation.

The terminology used should reflect the specific circumstances and available evidence.

## 5. What is the relationship between organised abuse and organised crime?

Organised abuse and organised crime can overlap, but they are not synonymous.

Organised crime generally refers to criminal activity undertaken by groups or networks. Organised abuse describes abusive conduct involving some degree of coordination or organisation.

Some organised criminal networks engage in systematic exploitation, trafficking, sexual violence or other forms of abuse. However, not every instance of organised abuse is necessarily connected to organised crime.

## 6. Can organised abuse involve human trafficking?

Yes. Human trafficking can involve coordinated networks of individuals who recruit, transport, harbour or receive people for exploitation.

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Different participants may perform different functions, including recruitment, transportation, accommodation, financial transactions, intimidation and exploitation.

Trafficking can involve sexual exploitation, forced labour, servitude and other forms of exploitation.

## 7. What is the role of recruitment and grooming in organised abuse?

Recruitment and grooming may be used to gain access to individuals, establish trust, create dependency or facilitate exploitation.

In some organised exploitation cases, different individuals may be responsible for identifying, approaching, grooming or exploiting victims.

Grooming can involve gradual boundary violations, manipulation, gifts, attention, threats or the normalisation of abusive behaviour.

## 8. How is secrecy maintained in organised abuse?

Depending on the circumstances, perpetrators may use intimidation, threats, manipulation, social pressure and the exploitation of personal relationships to discourage disclosure.

Other methods may include:

- Threatening victims or their families.
- Creating dependency.
- Isolating individuals from support networks.
- Using shame or humiliation.
- Concealing abusive activities.
- Discouraging contact with authorities.
- Exploiting positions of trust or authority.

These behaviours are not unique to organised abuse and can also occur in individual and group-based abusive situations.

## 9. Can organised abuse occur within families?

Yes. Organised abuse can occur within family structures and extended family networks.

In some cases, multiple family members may participate in, facilitate or conceal abusive behaviour. Family relationships, dependency and established power dynamics can make disclosure and intervention particularly difficult.

However, family involvement should never be presumed without supporting information.

## 10. Can organised abuse occur within institutions?

Yes. Institutional abuse occurs when individuals are abused within organisations or institutions, or when institutional structures, practices or failures enable abuse to occur or continue.

Examples may include abuse within residential care settings, schools, religious organisations, detention facilities and other environments where individuals depend on people in positions of authority.

Institutional abuse does not automatically mean that abuse was centrally organised. It is important to distinguish deliberate coordination from institutional negligence, inadequate safeguarding and failures of oversight.

## 11. What is the relationship between organised abuse and cults or high-control groups?

Some high-control groups have been associated with abusive practices, including coercion, exploitation, intimidation, forced labour and sexual abuse.

Group structures, authority relationships, isolation and pressure to conform can be used to facilitate or conceal abusive behaviour.

However, high-control groups are not necessarily abusive, and allegations must be assessed on their individual merits.

## 12. Can organised abuse involve psychological manipulation?

Yes. Psychological manipulation can be used to establish control, maintain dependency, undermine confidence and discourage resistance or disclosure.

Potential behaviours include:

- Gaslighting.
- Threats and intimidation.
- Humiliation and degradation.
- Emotional blackmail.
- Social isolation.
- Manipulation of personal relationships.
- Exploitation of fears and vulnerabilities.
- Repeated psychological coercion.

These behaviours may be carried out by one individual or by several people acting together.

## 13. What is the relationship between organised abuse and coercive control?

Coercive control describes a pattern of behaviour intended to dominate another person and restrict their autonomy.

In organised abuse, multiple individuals may contribute to controlling behaviour through intimidation, surveillance, isolation, threats or manipulation.

The legal definition of coercive control varies between jurisdictions, and not every pattern of controlling behaviour meets the relevant legal threshold.

## 14. Can organised abuse be prolonged over many years?

Yes. Some forms of organised exploitation and abuse continue over extended periods.

The duration may be influenced by dependency, intimidation, access to victims, perpetrators' relationships and failures to identify or address safeguarding concerns.

However, duration alone does not establish that abuse was organised.

## 15. What psychological effects can organised abuse have on survivors?

The psychological effects vary considerably. Individuals who experience prolonged or repeated abuse may experience:

- Post-traumatic stress symptoms.
- Complex trauma.
- Dissociation.
- Anxiety and depression.
- Hypervigilance.
- Shame and self-blame.
- Difficulties with trust and relationships.

- Sleep disturbances.
- Emotional dysregulation.
- Feelings of helplessness and isolation.

The effects depend on the individual's experiences, circumstances, support systems and other contributing factors.

## 16. What is the relationship between organised abuse and dissociative disorders?

Dissociation can occur in response to overwhelming or traumatic experiences. It may involve disruptions in memory, identity, awareness, perception or a person's sense of connection with themselves and their surroundings.

Some individuals with histories of prolonged childhood trauma experience dissociative symptoms or dissociative disorders.

However, dissociation is not proof of organised abuse, and a diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) does not establish the circumstances or perpetrators of alleged abuse.

## 17. Why might survivors struggle to disclose organised abuse?

Disclosure may be complicated by fear, intimidation, shame, dependency, confusion and concerns about personal safety.

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Where several perpetrators are involved, survivors may also fear that information will be shared among individuals within the same network.

Some individuals may find it difficult to discuss their experiences because of trauma-related symptoms or concerns about how their accounts will be received.

## 20. Is organised abuse always connected to ritual or religious practices?

No. Organised abuse does not necessarily involve religious, occult, ceremonial or ritual activities.

Although some allegations of organised abuse include descriptions of ritualised or religiously framed activities, the presence of such descriptions does not independently establish that an organised network exists.

Each allegation requires careful, evidence-based assessment.

## 21. What is the difference between organised abuse and organised ritual abuse?

Organised abuse is a broad descriptive term for coordinated or structured abusive activity involving multiple perpetrators.

Organised ritual abuse is a more specific term used in some clinical, survivor and advocacy contexts to describe allegations of organised abuse involving ritualised, ceremonial or religiously framed activities.

The terminology is not a universally standardised clinical or legal classification. Claims about particular practices, networks or perpetrators require independent investigation and supporting evidence.

## 22. What is the role of safeguarding professionals?

Safeguarding professionals have responsibilities to identify risks, respond appropriately to disclosures and take action where individuals may be experiencing abuse or exploitation.

Their work may involve:

- Assessing immediate safety.
- Identifying potential victims at risk.
- Following safeguarding procedures.
- Making appropriate referrals.
- Sharing information lawfully and proportionately.
- Coordinating with relevant agencies.
- Supporting access to specialist services.

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## 23. Can organised abuse be prevented?

Prevention involves effective safeguarding, accountability, education, appropriate oversight and the recognition of abusive behaviour.

Important preventative measures include:

- Clear safeguarding policies.
- Appropriate recruitment and background checks.
- Independent reporting mechanisms.
- Staff training.
- Effective complaints procedures.
- Monitoring of high-risk environments.
- Prompt investigation of credible allegations.
- Protection against retaliation for reporting abuse.

## 24. Where can survivors of organised abuse seek help?

Survivors may seek assistance from qualified trauma-informed therapists, sexual violence services, child protection services, human trafficking support organisations, domestic abuse services and relevant safeguarding authorities.

Support should be individualised, confidential within appropriate professional and legal limits, and respectful of the survivor's autonomy.

# Organised Abuse FAQ2

**Distinction:** Group-based abuse describes the number of perpetrators involved; organised abuse describes the nature and degree of coordination between them.

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