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Protecting Minors in our Schools

Preventing and Responding
to Sexualised Violence

Promoting a Consistent Culture of Protection Project

A global Jesuit Response to Abuse oriented to Social Impact

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1 Promotion of a consistent culture of protection: the history on breaking the silence and preventing abuse in the Society of Jesus

Awakening: breaking the silence

The 36th General Congregation (GC) of the Society of Jesus took place in 2016. General Congregations focus on the election of a General and/or discussion on the life and works of the Society in the world of today. GC 36 did both. Needless to say, the abuse crisis became a moment

of focused conversation. In previous years journalists, the print, and social media highlighted violence against children and vulnerable adults in different institutions run by State and Church agencies. However, much of this media attention was focused on cases in the global North. Conversations between delegates from the four corners of the world helped attendees to wake up to the fact that the abuse of children and vulnerable adults has no national, cultural, religious, caste or ethnic boundaries (Oates et al., 2000). It is neither exclusive to the Church nor to the Society of Jesus (Plante, 2020). Sexual abuse is a global social problem that reaches into all sectors of humanity (Barth et al., 2013; Finkelhor, 1986); it is present in political parties, schools, sports clubs, extracurricular activities, nightlife settings, families, etc. Therefore, it requires a response and not a denial from the Society of Jesus, the Church, and the society at large. In GC 36, the silence was broken in the universal body of the Society of Jesus, and the important harm done to victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by Jesuit priests was acknowledged. The damage of sexual abuse by clergy includes the negative physical and mental outcomes which are now well studied in the scientific literature on child sexual abuse and sexual harassment of adults (Kathryn, 2019; Molnar et al., 2001) as well as devastating consequences for the victims' spiritual dimension and faith (Guido, 2008).

In GC 36, discussion continued in small groups on upholding the United Nations Convention on Child Rights. Inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, we must diligently promote the rights of children and vulnerable adults. The

dignity of all, and especially the dignity of the weakest in society, must lead to providing a coherent response to the universal protection of children and the vulnerable.

It was clear that delivering a comprehensive response to safeguarding includes developing living policies, training for all, and protocols for handling complaints and allegations. However, building safe places for children goes beyond mere compliance to basic standards. Fundamentally, it must lead to a transformation of culture (Guiney & Racionero-Plaza, 2023a). The Promotion of a Consistent Culture of Protection Project that we present in this chapter invites different cultures to a self-examination of how it relates to children and vulnerable adults in their communities. It is a call to examine how people with power relate to the powerless and those on the margins. Fundamentally, this means a change in the quality of relationships among people – how they live and interact with one another. In the language of Pope Francis, promoting a consistent culture of protection is a gospel journey needing a gospel response.

Awareness

In October 2018, a response to the conversations in GC 36 was launched by the Society of Jesus when it initiated a project called the *Promotion of a Consistent Culture of Protection* (PCCP) (Guiney & Racionero-Plaza, 2023b). It located this project under the auspices of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES), in the General Curia. In doing this the Society noted that preventing

abuse and accompanying victims is a justice issue. It is unequivocally part and parcel of the mission of justice and reconciliation of the Society of Jesus as evidenced through the Universal Apostolic Preference 2 (UAP2) *Walking with the Excluded* (Sosa, 2019):

“We commit ourselves to help eliminate abuses inside and outside the Church, seeking to ensure that victims are heard and properly helped, that justice is done, and that harm is healed. Our commitment includes the adoption of clear policies for the prevention of abuse, the on-going formation of those who are committed to mission, and serious efforts to identify the social origins of abuse. In this way, we effectively promote a culture that safeguards all vulnerable persons, especially minors”.

Safeguarding now is understood in the Society of Jesus as central to its mission of doing justice and reconciliation. It is neither marginal, nor a mere addendum to its work. It is not just a question of ticking boxes and merely being compliant with external rules. Protecting children and vulnerable adults is indeed a prophetic call in our age – a preferential option to stand for the voiceless in our society. However, it calls for personal and institutional conversion. As Pope Francis (2019) puts it, it requires ‘a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church’.

However, it is not sufficient to be awake and aware of

what needs to be done. Concrete decisions and actions are needed to fulfil the desire to help those who have been hurt, place victims first, and meet their desire that such abuse will never happen again in any Church institution. To create safe places for all requires the implementation of basic standards and the implementation of actions and programs that support the transformation of our human relationships, something which is a long-term project and mission.

2 Action: toward safeguarding grounded in scientific evidence of social impact

After awakening and awareness, action is needed. It is action what makes a difference. Part of that action includes developing policies and protocols for child protection and for the protection of all adults in our Jesuit works, among which schools are prominent. The first stages of PCCP (2019–2022) involved encouraging and supporting all Jesuit Provinces and Regions in the world in developing and implementing protocols and policies on safeguarding. These protocols and policies dealt with diverse indicators of protection, involving, among others, having a safeguarding statement of commitment, customised documentation, safe recruitment procedures, designated safeguarding personnel, regular risk assessments, protocols for reporting and responding, accessible complaints mechanisms, case management support structures, accompaniment of victims/survivors, and guidance of alleged/perpetrators, among others.

Policies and protocols in educational institutions are relevant to set a framework of protection of children and vulnerable adults, a framework that informs others of the stand of the institution in relation to abuse and the expected behaviours of its members. All policies need to communicate clearly that the care of children and the vulnerable has primacy. Their safety and their protection when in our care are our priorities. This must be communicated through all media platforms and displayed on all school notice boards.

A number of key elements must be in each policy, e.g. when advertising and recruiting new team members, the child protection policy must be clearly communicated. This is central, as protection begins with safe recruitment and follow-up formation. In addition, regular risk assessments are crucial to prevention. Regular risk assessments of people, places and events need to take place in all Jesuit works dealing with children and adults; and they are essential in schools and universities. Research is very clear in this regard: where there is violence in human relationships, that being in the form of child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, bullying, abuse of power, etc, academic excellence is not possible. The review of the scientific literature has shown that when a child is victim of abuse, it diminishes her or his academic achievement, as well as it affects his or her mental and physical health (Flecha, Puigvert & Racionero-Plaza, 2023). The same happens with adults (Kathryn, 2019; Molnar et al., 2001). Best learning can only take place and excellence can only be achieved in safe schools.



Pictures of two walls in Saint Joseph School, Kangemi, Nairobi. This statement can be found a number of times all over the school, always in very visible places. Pictures were taken by the authors in April 2023.

Thanks to this, Jesuit schools all over the world have in place safeguarding policies and protocols to protect children and to respond to any case of child sexual abuse. We have seen this in schools located in very different contexts, from the slums in Nairobi (Masenge & Osabwa, 2023) to schools in wealthy areas in Dublin.

Apart from developing and implementing policies and protocols, action has also meant putting in place basic training and formation for Jesuits and collaborators, so that Jesuit human capital gets the knowledge of what is required in safeguarding, and most importantly, the knowledge of *why* it is required. Effective implementation of actions addressed to contribute to eliminate abuse requires such training for everyone involved in this global mission of the Ignatian family. The Society of Jesus instructs that all Provinces and Regions develop induction of all personnel, implement training specific to certain roles and responsibilities in Jesuit works, training in leadership and in management of conduct and cases, safeguarding integrated at all stages of Jesuit formation, and allocation

of human and financial resources to safeguarding training. PCCP supports all Provinces and Regions in these tasks.

A 2022 Audit conducted in all Provinces and Regions of the global Society of Jesus indicated the many advancements done in relation to protocols, policies, and training in just 3 years. In the light of the findings from this audit, we can say that the universal Society has now moved from awakening and awareness to action, and it is the norm almost everywhere now that Jesuit schools have become safer places in comparison to the past. Despite differences among Provinces and Regions, all Jesuit schools are now obliged to have procedures in place to protect a child from abuse and whenever this may happen to accompany victims.

Our commitment, guided by UAP2, is to contribute to eliminate abuse, and that requires being engaged in safeguarding work that makes a difference. It is necessary and essential to have policies and protocols in place, and to have trained key personnel. The wider community also needs to be sensitized on the core elements of safeguarding. However, it is not a question of doing safeguarding training but a question of doing the right safeguarding right. Therefore, our commitment in the Society of Jesus is not doing safeguarding, but doing safeguarding that proves to be most effective in both mitigating the negative consequences of abuse and in fostering relational contexts that are preventive of violent relationships. That is what victims deserve, what most of them request, and what every child and adult in any Jesuit

school or other Jesuit work is entitled to. That is the best expression of *Cura Personalis*, and it is also making real that child's right to benefit from scientific progress to improve his life, as it is stated in article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

Fortunately, this service in our Jesuit schools is possible. Scientific research in the field of sexual abuse prevention and response has provided knowledge on principles and actions that are key to support victims and to promote preventive relationships, contexts, and institutions. It is a question of using this knowledge to base safeguarding actions in them. However, we should make a clarification here. The knowledge that will make a difference in preventing abuse is not all kinds of scientific knowledge but *scientific evidence of social impact*. These are two different types of evidence, and they have different implications for safeguarding in schools. Horizon Europe, the European Commission's Framework Program for Scientific Research, and other international scientific research programs have clarified the difference between scientific evidence and the subset of it that has demonstrated societal impact (EC et al., 2018). All scientific evidence is relevant, but the one that is indispensable for safeguarding in the Church and in society at large is scientific evidence of social impact (Pulido et al., 2018; Racionero-Plaza, 2023). There is, for example, scientific knowledge derived from research that describes well how and why abuse occurs, but which has not provided information on how to contribute to reducing sexual abuse. Perhaps that early

evidence will become the basis for further research that will produce evidence of social impact.

What safeguarding delegates as well as all professionals working with children and adults in Jesuit and Church works urgently need is scientific evidence of social impact, which tells them which practices prevent abuse, eliminate it, and contribute to creating a consistent culture of protection, care, and quality relationships.

3 Successful actions in safeguarding

Fortunately, the knowledge on what works best in safeguarding in schools is available and most of it is open access. The best example in this regard is the European Commission's Report *Achieving student well-being for all: educational contexts free of violence* (Flecha, Puigvert & Racionero-Plaza, 2023), which examines worldwide programs and actions that have proven to overcome violence against children from schools. This open access report clarifies that, according to the available evidence of social impact, there are 13 programs and actions in safeguarding that prove to address abuse, mitigate its consequences, and create preventive environments. The report also lists programs, some of which are quite popular in schools and very expensive, and for which the data published does not show positive impact. Those programs are often part of what has become the 'safeguarding industry'. Importantly, the report analyzes common elements among the examined programs and actions that yield

evidence of generating improvements. One shared element is the *whole school approach*, meaning that those schools that achieve to be protective of children and prevent abuse are those that involve parents, other family members, community members, teachers, students, community services, etc, in their actions for a zero tolerance to violence culture. A lesson derives from this evidence: the prevention and elimination of child sexual abuse must be a community concern in our Jesuit schools. Abuse is not the issue that the safeguarding person in the schools deals with, but a social problem that affects the whole community and requires the whole community to act united both to cultivate quality human relationships that prevent abuse and to respond as upstanders in front of any aggression.

Among the list of actions and programs that have proven to yield positive change and create and sustain a culture of protection, care, and respect, some have shown to achieve so in a wide variety of geographical and socio-cultural contexts. Those programs are called "successful actions" (Flecha, 2015). The successful actions in safeguarding are the following: the Zero Violence Brave Club, the Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts, the Elimination of Isolating Violence, and the Scientific/Feminist Dialogic Gatherings. More than 10,000 schools around the world that are already applying some of these actions achieve transformative results, including the reduction of abusive relationships, the development of a new culture of care and respect in the classrooms and school, training students to be upstanders in the school and beyond, supporting

friendships, reducing conflicts, and training students to effectively address abuse in their life (Burn, 2009; Duque et al, 2021; Melgar et al., 2021; Moschella & Banyar, 2020; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2020; Roca-Campos et al, 2021; Salceda et al., 2020; Ugalde et al., 2022).

As an example, the San José School in Valencia (Spain) applies the Zero Violence Brave Club since many years (Claramunt, 2023). This successful action has been included in the European Toolkit for Schools¹ of the European Commission, as an effective intervention to boost school climate. With this successful action, in the San José School:

Every day 800 boys and girls learn to take a stand, and position themselves on the side of the victim and confront the aggressor in a peaceful way. In this way, problems are made visible, and victims are empowered with a shield of friends, which gives them security in front of the aggressor. The attractiveness is given to children who are kind, who are supportive and, in short, who treat others well. (...) The results have been monitored and they show that the school climate is getting better and better. The evaluation surveys sent to families have also shown very positive results (Partal Montesinos, Educate Magis, November 1, 2019).

¹ European Commission's toolkit for improving school climate and culture can be found here: <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/detail.cfm?n=5886>

In recognition of these relevant transformations in the fields of protection and coexistence, this Jesuit school was awarded a “coexistence prize” in 2019 (Partal Montesinos, 2019).

Those achievements are now enjoyed by thousands of children and adolescents all over the world who attend schools that have opted to implement what works best. Importantly, the successful actions in safeguarding yield these positive results at all educational levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary education), and with all students, including students victims of sexual abuse, students that belong to vulnerable groups (refugee, migrant, LGTBQI+, students with disabilities, etc), and students from all socio-economic backgrounds (Flecha, Puigvert & Racionero-Plaza, 2023).

4 Training/formation oriented to social impact

One important finding of the 2022 global audit was the need for quality training. Provinces and Regions acknowledged that they had received the basic knowledge on child protection, on abuse definitions, on how to develop basic policies and protocols, yet they needed to move to the next stage in practice. Provinces and Regions expressed their need for being trained in specific tools to create safe environments, a new culture of protection, and to solve problems of abuse in the most effective way. Since January 2023, PCCP has started to respond to this international request with a scientific and social impact perspective, to help Jesuits and lay partners in mission to intervene in Jesuit works in ways

that best reduce abuse and create safe environments.

A number of actions have taken place across Jesuit Conferences in this regard. As illustrations, in February 2023 formation on myths and evidence regarding sexual abuse and the Church was given to about 70 Scholastics (Jesuits in formation) in the Ateneo de Manila (Phillippines), in April 2023, a 7-hour workshop on successful actions in safeguarding took place in Nairobi (Kenya), this workshop was anended by 25 professionals and collaborators working in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, served by the Jesuit Refugee Service. In between, in March 2023, another training on successful actions in overcoming abuse was provided to the directors of all the organizations that make up the Xavier Network, which unites 14 members, mission offices and non-governmental development organizations of the Jesuit Provinces of Europe, North America and Australia that work to promote justice. The Network intervenes in more than 87 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The training was framed within the rigorous work of the Xavier Network in the field of safeguarding. Other training and formation activities have taken place throughout 2023, always oriented to achieving social impact. In all these activities, participants have gained knowledge of successful actions in safeguarding and of the original sources where evidence of the impact of those actions can be checked.

5 Conclusion: a bright horizon ahead

The global Society of Jesus has broken the silence regarding child sexual abuse and the abuse of vulnerable adults. The acknowledgement of this social problem in Jesuit works was the first step of a diligent journey in all Jesuit conferences across the world. This journey has already implied that up to date, most Jesuit works in the 70+ Jesuit Provinces and Regions have policies, protocols and training in place. Those Jesuit works in the five continents are today safer for the people they serve.

Since 2019 PCCP has assisted all of them in getting it and getting it right. We have collaborated with Jesuits and lay partners to make real the dream of a world free from abuse in very diverse settings. This has been a best expression of safeguarding being a community mission of the global Ignatian family, a mission which starts with each of us opening our eyes, breaking the silence, and taking a stand supporting the most vulnerable. Jesuit schools, as central contexts of child development, are certainly at the core of this mission.

Now, we move forward to the next chapters of this dream on the shoulders of scientific evidence of social impact. This approach is going to shape the training and formation of the works of the Society of Jesus in the coming years. In so doing, we meet Fr. Pedro Arrupe's desire of giving the most updated answers to the most pressing current social problems. The horizon is bright: United in this social impact approach, Jesuit schools can, once again, inspire society at large across the globe on a cause that is just, noble and most urgent.

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